



**CHARLEY
SAYS...**

THE SCARY WORLD OF 1970s
PUBLIC INFORMATION FILMS

*FART AT THE DEVIL MARTIN LUTHER'S ANAL EXORCISMS
CLAWS FOR THOUGHT BUNGAY'S BLACK SHUCK FESTIVAL
SCREW THE PUTSCH GERMANY'S FOURTH REICH FIASCO*

WORLD'S OLDEST CAT • ELECTRIC ROCKS • GONZO SPINACH • CHARLES THE VAMPIRE KING

**THE
WORLD'S
WEIRDEST
NEWS**

THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

WWW.FORTEANTIMES.COM

ForteanTimes

FT429 MARCH 2023
£4.95

LOOKING FOR LAYLAH

IN SEARCH OF LEILA WADDELL,
BOHEMIAN, MUSICIAN & ALEISTER
CROWLEY'S MAGICKAL MUSE

OL' RED EYES IS BACK

FEAR AND LOATHING
ON THE CHICAGO
MOTHMAN TRAIL

VISIONS OF A FUTURE TRAGEDY

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE
AND THE WOMAN WHO
FORESAW DUNBLANE



Start Your Writing Journey Today!

Explore the exciting world of creative writing with this free mini-course from The Writers Bureau.

Writing is a wonderful creative outlet that can give you great pleasure and offers you the chance to earn a second income, extra spending money or even a full-time career. It's up to you how far you take it.

In this free online course you'll look at who can be a writer, what skills you'll need and the many different types of writing you could do, so you can begin to think about what you want to write, and in what form.

The course will help you reflect on why you want to write, what your aims and ambitions are, and how you're going to achieve them. Understanding your own motivation is an important part of the writing journey.

The course finishes by looking at a number of options available to help you start your writing life, support you along the way, and help develop your craft.

By the end of the course, you'll have gained a good understanding of what to expect as a writer, which type of writing you want to explore, what you hope to gain from it, and how best to move forward.

So, if you fancy being a writer, visit our website below and let's get started.

www.writersbureauonline.com

THE WRITERS BUREAU EST. 1989



Why Not Be A Proofreader?

As a freelance proofreader and copy editor you can earn a good income making sure that copy is professional and error free. Earning your share can be fun, varied and profitable.

Our Proofreading and Copy Editing Course will show you how to set yourself up as a freelancer – either full or part-time – putting you in control of your working life! You'll receive:

- A first-class, home-study course created by professionals
- Expert, personal tuition from your tutor
- Advice on all types of proofreading and copy editing techniques
- Plus much more!

If you want to be a proofreader and copy editor, this is the way to start! It's ideal for beginners. No previous experience or special education required. You can be earning in as little as 2-3 months. 15 day trial. For free details visit our website or call us today!

www.wbproofreading.com

FREE CALL
24 HRS

0800 389 7360

Quote Ref:
AT822P



www.facebook.com/thewritersbureau
www.twitter.com/writersbureau

email: FP@writersbureau.com Please include your name & address



Members of
NAWE



"The course has greatly improved and refreshed my grammatical knowledge, copy editing and proofreading. It has also sharpened my attention to detail. For the contract, I was able to set my own professional fee; and on the basis of my QTS, expertise and subject knowledge, I am earning £30.00 per hour."

Claire Ezard

Your Course Includes:

- Specialist course on proofreading and copy editing.
- Caring constructive help from expert tutors.
- Four tutor-marked assignments.
- Help and advice from our experienced Student Advisory Team.
- Flexible study programme.
- Specialist advice on how to find work.
- Enrol when it suits you.
- Instant access to course material when you enrol online.
- 15 days trial.
- Advice on how to set yourself up in business.
- Continuing Professional Development Certificate.

An Expert's Opinion of the Course

"The material is very informative and interesting as well as covering pretty much everything you would need to know when starting to proofread. There are a lot of tips and ideas for freelancers in general that you can see have been tried and tested and are being passed on in good faith.

"Overall, I found the information in this course very useful. It covered all the main areas that anyone interested in working as a proofreader/copy editor would need to know."

Shazia Fardous, Freelance Proofreader and Copy Editor

Start TODAY When You Enrol ONLINE!

START YOUR COURSE TODAY for only £398 (interest free easy pay plan available from £39.80pm) by visiting our website. Your course modules and the first assignment are online so you can start studying straightaway.

CONTENTS



32 Leila Waddell – musician, muse and Crowley survivor



13 World's oldest cat



22 Thunderbird photo quest



50 Anal exorcisms



38 Charley Says at 50



10 Turkey's suggestive UFO cloud



FORTEAN TIMES 429

Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE
70

STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: Mystery antennæ, Halifax hum, animal dreams, Fourth Reich plotters and more...

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| 12 ARCHÆOLOGY | 18 GHOSTWATCH |
| 14 CLASSICAL CORNER | 22 ALIEN ZOO |
| 16 SCIENCE | 30 THE UFO FILES |

FEATURES



32 COVER STORY LOOKING FOR LAYLAH

The late **DEAN BALLINGER** went in search of one of Aleister Crowley's 'scarlet women', the Australian violinist Leila

Waddell, an accomplished musician who survived her years with the Wickedest Man in the World with sanity and talent intact.

38 JUST SAY NO...

50 years ago, the Central Office of Information released the *Charley Says* films in which a ginger cat speaking in incomprehensible miaows warned children against strangers, matches, and other everyday perils. **EDWARD PARNELL** remembers the terrors unleashed by 1970s Public Information Films.

42 THE CHICAGO MOTHMAN, PART TWO

In 2011, reports started to come in from the American Midwest about a weird winged entity. There were plenty of terrified witnesses, but was it all the work of a serial hoaxer? **TEA KRULOS** concludes his look at the at the Chicago Mothman investigation.

SERIES

66 FORTEAN TRAVELLER

The Black Shuck Festival, Bungay **ROBERT HALLIDAY**

69 PECULIAR POSTCARDS

Susie in her castle **JAN BONDESON**

FORUM

49 Tuning in to the Hum **JERRY GLOVER**

50 Trump Derangement Syndrome **SD TUCKER**

REGULARS

- | | | |
|--------------|----------------|-------------------|
| 02 EDITORIAL | 61 LETTERS | 71 PHENOMENOMIX |
| 53 REVIEWS | 70 READER INFO | 72 STRANGE DEATHS |

EDITOR

DAVID SUTTON
drsutton@forteanimes.com

FOUNDING EDITORS

BOB RICKARD (ft-bobrickard@mail.com)
PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteanimes.com)

NEWS EDITOR

IAN SIMMONS (simmons@forteanimes.com)

ART DIRECTOR

ETIENNE GILFILLAN (etienne@forteanimes.com)

BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR

DAVID V BARRETT (dvbarrett@forteanimes.com)

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

ABIGAIL MASON

RESIDENT CARTOONIST

HUNT EMERSON

PRODUCTION MANAGER

LEE BOYMAN (lee.boyman@metropolis.co.uk)

ADVERTISING

BEN LORTON (ben.lorton@metropolis.co.uk)

FT ON THE INTERNET

www.forteanimes.com
www.facebook.com/forteanimes

FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Diamond Publishing Limited, a member of the Metropolis Group, by WILD TALENTS LTD. Postal address: Fortean Times, PO BOX 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 issues: UK £50.58; Europe £62; USA £70;
Rest of the world £70

CHANGE YOUR ADDRESS, RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION OR REPORT PROBLEMS:

hello@metropolis.co.uk / +44 (0) 208 752 8195

LICENSING & SYNDICATION

FORTEAN TIMES is available for international licensing and syndication Commercial Managing Director David Saunders TEL: +44 (0) 208 752 8195 david.saunders@metropolis.co.uk

DISTRIBUTION

DISTRIBUTED IN UK, IRELAND AND WORLDWIDE

by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU. Tel: 02037879101.

Email: hello@marketforce.co.uk

Speciality store distribution by Worldwide Magazine Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 78 12720121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 78 1272

DIAMOND PUBLISHING LTD.

PUBLISHED BY DIAMOND PUBLISHING LIMITED.
A MEMBER OF THE METROPOLIS GROUP.

Fortean Times (ISSN 0308-5899 USPS 023-728) is published 13 times a year by Diamond Publishing Limited, 2nd Floor, Saunders House, 52-53 The Mall, Ealing, W5 3AT, United Kingdom. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256).

US POSTMASTER: Send address changes to WORLD CONTAINER INC 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.
© Diamond Publishing Limited: FEBRUARY 2023



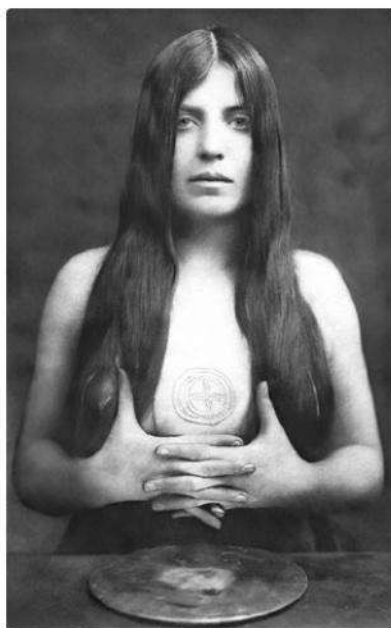
COVER ILLUSTRATION
ETIENNE GILFILLAN

PRINTED BY
PRECISION COLOUR
PRINTING

EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS



LEILA AND DEAN

It's become something of a running joke among FT readers that barely an issue goes by without some reference to Aleister Crowley: the Great Beast was nothing if not an assiduous courter of publicity, so we're sure he'd be only too happy to learn of his regular appearances in these pages. This time, though, we focus on one of the women in his life.

One aspect of Crowley's work that is not often remarked on is his sometimes surprising acknowledgement of his magickal collaborators; it seems uncharacteristic and goes against the grain of what we know of his exploitative and often callous treatment of fellow travellers along esoteric paths.

Leila Waddell met Crowley in London in 1908; an itinerant musician from Australia, she was making a name for herself as a talented violinist when she entered the Beast's orbit. Immortalised as Crowley's 'L.A.Y.L.A.H' in an iconic photograph of 1911 – staring straight at the camera from beneath her dark tresses and wearing the 'mark of the beast' on her naked breast – the real Leila Waddell was more than just another of Crowley's 'Scarlet Women' or long-suffering occult muses: she was an active collaborator in such projects as the Rites of Eleusis, staged in London in 1910, receiving joint credit with Crowley for the performances. She also walked away from her Crowley years with her sanity intact and resumed her musical career. In this issue's cover story, her fellow antipodean the late Dean Ballinger tells the story of the real woman behind the

famous photo (pp.32-37).

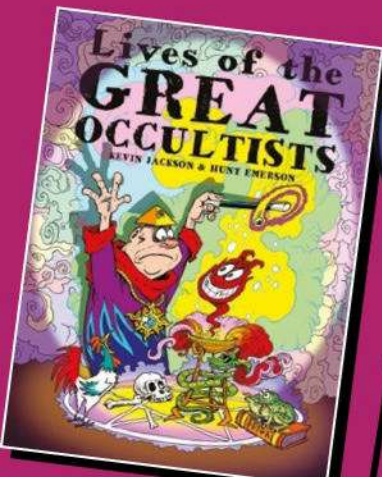
Dean was a great friend and highly valued contributor to FT over the years, writing brilliant articles on everything from David Bowie (FT338:28-33) and Mark E Smith (FT364:53) to Salvador Dalí (FT404:56-57) and the Golden Dawn in New Zealand (FT410:44-49). He investigated the links between conspiracy theory and pop culture in cover stories on The Beatles (FT384:30-37) and Stanley Kubrick (FT332:32-36). When not writing on Fortean subjects, Dean was usually doing his day job as lecturer in screen and media studies at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and working on a book about conspiracy theories and the Internet. Tragically, in 2020 Dean was diagnosed with a terminal illness – Motor Neurone Disease – and eventually had to step back from his teaching duties. He continued with his research, and wrote this issue's piece on Leila Waddell – the last he would complete for FT – and was at work on a number of other projects before his sudden death in August of last year.

When he shared the news of his diagnosis with us, he wrote the following words: "I would like to express my thanks to the Fortean Times team for producing a magazine which has always been a source of pleasure to me over the last 25 years or so since I started buying it regularly – erudite, entertaining, provocative, wondrous, humorous, and enlightening.

"Most of my working life has been spent in various academic teaching positions. I consider the wealth of FT articles on any number of diverse topics to be as important a part of my education as 'formal' academia: I have often used FT articles as teaching and research aids. Having several articles published in FT over the last few years is a personal achievement I am especially proud of – at least I know that more than 10 people will read them, unlike most academic journal articles..."

And we're especially proud to present Dean's final FT article in this issue, and to share an appreciation of him by his old friend and bandmate (Dean was a lifelong musician among many other things) Andrew Dean in this month's Necrolog (p.28)

For anyone wanting to find out more about Dean's life and career, there's an obituary at: www.stuff.co.nz/waikato-times/news/129820403/flaming-cymbals-satirical-comics-and-a-phd-the-life-of-dean-ross-ballinger-19732022. Dean will be missed, even by those of us who never got to meet him.



LARGECOW

The Online Shop for HUNT EMERSON

LIVES OF THE GREAT OCCULTISTS

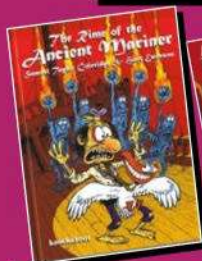
120 pages in colour, including Dr. Dee, Giordano Bruno, Isobel Gowdie, William Blake, WB Yeats, Faust, Jack Parsons, Kenneth Anger, Madame Blavatski, and - repeatedly - Aleister Crowley.

£12.99



GREAT OCCULTISTS - 4 SIGNED PRINTS

Featured in my *Great Occultists* book, these portraits are A3 size signed prints, great for framing or an enviable birthday gift! A limited set of prints, only available from Largecow.com £25.00



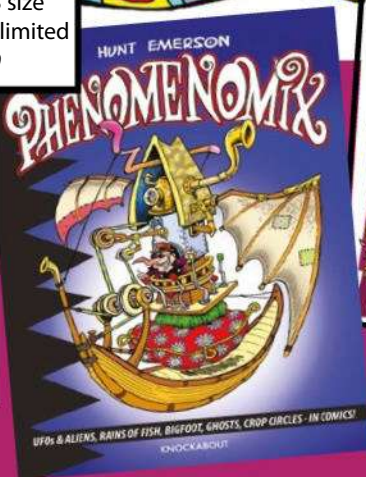
DANTE'S INFERNO THE ANCIENT MARINER AND MORE!

All sorts of treats on Largecow.com

PHENOMENOMIX

240 pages in full colour. Collecting most of my pages from Fortean Times - tales of the unexplained, true, half true and totally invented.

£22.99



***ALL BOOKS ARE SIGNED!**
***MANY HAVE SKETCHES!**
***PERSONAL DEDICATIONS ARRANGED!**
***FREE STICKERS ETC. USUALLY INCLUDED!!**

WWW.LARGECOW.COM

BOOKS. ORIGINAL ARTWORK. CARTOONS. COMICS PAGES. PRINTS. FREE GIFTS.



A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

LONDON'S HARDY TREE FALLS



CAMDEN COUNCIL

ABOVE: The Hardy Tree photographed after being felled in a storm last December, and in its prime (right). **BELOW:** Thomas Hardy, after whom the St Pancras ash was named.

One of Britain's legendary trees was felled by winter storms in December. The Hardy Tree in St Pancras Churchyard in central London was an ash tree surrounded by close-packed gravestones uprooted from elsewhere in the churchyard. It gets its name from the novelist and poet Thomas Hardy.

In the 1860s, when Hardy was in his early 20s and not yet a writer, he worked as an architect for the prestigious London practice of Arthur Broomfield. Broomfield had the commission from the Bishop of London to disinter and rebury a large number of graves in Old St Pancras cemetery as part of the work to build the station, whose tracks now run immediately behind the wall near which the tree stood, and Hardy was given the job of overseeing the work onsite. Once the bodies were removed and reburied elsewhere, Hardy is said to have had the gravestones stacked

Over the years the tree had grown round some of the gravestones

around the young ash standing in the remaining part of the graveyard (see **FT375:19-20**).

Over the years, the tree had grown round and enclosed some of the gravestones, creating a romantic and somewhat gothic spectacle popular with visitors seeking alternative London landmarks; the church's website called the tree a "monument to the railway encroachments of the 19th century".

The end of the tree was not unexpected; it was found to be suffering from fungus in 2014 and since then Camden Council had been managing its decline, trimming back its crown to minimise stresses and fencing

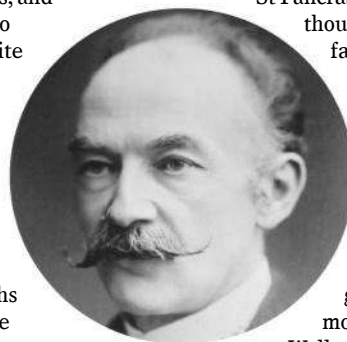
the area off, but December's high winds hastened its demise.

However, there is considerable doubt that the tree actually has any connection to Hardy. While he did oversee the exhumation work on the site, his was not a hands-on role. That was left to the clerk of works, and Hardy's job was to briefly visit the site each evening to monitor what he had been doing. More damningly, amateur historian David Bingham has found photographs showing the circle of gravestones in 1926, with absolutely no sign of a tree in the centre, and indeed believes the circular arrangement itself only dates to 1877, when the graveyard became a public park. Ash trees are extremely fast growing, so

one would have had no problem sprouting in the centre of the gravestones and reaching maturity between 1926 and the first mentions of the Hardy story, which Bingham can date back no further than an Iain Sinclair reference in 1997. Old

St Pancras Churchyard, though, still remains fabled as the site of assignations between the poet Shelley and his future wife Mary, which took place at the grave of her mother, Mary

Wollstonecraft, and as the location of the Soane family mausoleum, reputed to be the inspiration for the design of the classic British phone box. *theguardian.com*, 29 Nov; *BBC News*, 28 Dec 2022; *thelondondead.blogspot.com*.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



CROCODILE ROCK

Mummified crocodiles galore in Egypt

PAGE 12



DO DOGS DREAM?

New research is no surprise to pet lovers

PAGE 16



FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

The Japanese killing stone strikes again

PAGE 26

UTAH'S MYSTERY ANTENNÆ

Officials in Salt Lake City, Utah, have been baffled by a series of mysterious antennæ that have appeared in the foothills around the city over the past year.

The devices are not complex, consisting of a LoRa fiberglass antenna connected to a locked battery pack, with a solar panel to keep it charged. At least a dozen have been found and removed by the Salt Lake City Public Lands Department as it is illegal to install structures on public land without permission; others have appeared on land belonging to the University of Utah and the Forest Service. Some of the devices have been installed high up on steep peaks in the area, including 7,000ft (2,134m) up on Mount Wire, with one requiring a team of five people to remove it. The antennæ are usually bolted to the underlying rock and have no identifying marks on them that would give a clue to their origin. Tyler Fonarow, Salt Lake City's recreational trails manager, said he thought it would take at least two people to install them: "The three main components are a suitcase sized... plastic, weatherproof case for their electric equipment for the battery and router. It was about 50 or 60lb (23-27kg). And then there's two antennas, four to six feet, and the solar panel which is about three by four feet. It would be a pretty tough thing to do by yourself."

There has been much speculation as to who has been installing the devices and why, with some people thinking they might be signal boosters for mobile phones. Others have suggested gangs using them for private communications, and, inevitably, aliens; but the most likely suspects are cryptocurrency miners. Most



ABOVE: Strange antenna rigs like this one have been discovered in the foothills around Salt Lake City, leaving officials puzzled.

cryptocurrencies are generated by either proof-of-work, which involves solving equations, or proof-of-stake, which relates to how much digital storage capacity the miners have. One cryptocurrency, though, known as Helium, works through proof-of-coverage. This means that the larger area covered by the network you build, the more Helium you are mining. Helium mining also uses exactly the kind of antennæ being found around Salt Lake City, although a flaw seems to be that the cost of deploying these would not be a worthwhile investment

considering the value of the currency. Fonarow says that the devices haven't caused any damage and it is unlikely anyone will be criminally charged if the owners are found. "As long as it's not dangerous, we really don't care," he said. "We just want people to stop doing it so we can get back to taking care of our lands... we want to stop it now before it becomes a dumping ground for dozens and dozens more antennas. If someone wanted to put an antenna in the exact same location for scientific purposes, we'd probably allow it," he says. *Vice.com*, 6 Jan 2023.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

OCTOPUS BUYS TECH FIRM TO HELP PEOPLE PREPARE FOR DEATH

FTAdvisor.com, 12 Dec 2022.

Charity boss put cancer cash into huge dragon plan

BBC News, 29 Sept 2022.

DEATH BY WEETABIX

Daily Star, 18 June 2022.

Naked 'werewolf' in court for hitting 'Jesus'

(Brisbane) Courier Mail, 2 Nov 2022.

CRIMINAL NOT TO REPEAT DISPLAY AT WIGAN

Hull Daily Mail, 2 Jan 2023.

"I lost £70,000 because a rogue tenant filled my house with rotting trout"

D.Telegraph, 7 Nov 2022.



SIDELINES

FEISTY FUNERAL

Mourners at the funeral of Jodie Perryman, 81, were surprised when they opened the cards that Jodie had prepared for them before her death. They each contained a hand-made Ouija board and the message "Let's keep in touch!" *today.com*, 20 Oct 2022.

FLAMING BIKER

When an Arkansas state trooper tried to stop biker Christopher Gaylor, 38, because his bike had no visible license plate, he took off at high speed, leading to a chase that only ended when another officer tasered Gaylor, causing him to unexpectedly explode. "An investigation has revealed Gaylor was carrying approximately 1 gallon (3.8l) of gasoline in a backpack," said a police spokesperson. He is expected to make a full recovery in hospital. *edition.cnn.com*, 27 Oct 2022.

KNOB

Having evacuated and sealed off part of the town centre of Burton Latimer in Northamptonshire after receiving reports of an unexploded wartime hand grenade, police discovered it was actually a green doorknob. *D.Star*, 16 Sept 2022

ART OOPS!

When researching a new exhibition on the artist Piet Mondrian, famed for his abstract pictures of coloured grids, curator Susanne Meyer-Büser realised that one of them, *New York City I*, had been hung upside down since 1945. She found a photo of it on the easel in the artist's studio showing it the right way up and realised the error, but as the picture is made with adhesive tape, reversing it now risks damaging it, so it will continue to be displayed upside down. *BBC News*, 28 Oct 2022.



MARTIN ROSS

WEIRD WILDLIFE

Circling sheep, falling birds and an out-of-place masturbating walrus



LIKE SHEEP

In China, CCTV monitoring a sheep pen in Inner Mongolia filmed dozens of sheep walking in a circle for 12 days without stopping. The flock owner, named by the *People's Daily* as Ms Miao, said that it began with just a few sheep circling and then others gradually joined in. It was suggested that they might be suffering from listeriosis, a bacterial infection sometimes known as "circling disease", caused by spoiled or low-quality silage. The symptoms of this are described as follows: "Initially, affected animals are anorectic, depressed, and disoriented. They may propel themselves into corners, lean against stationary objects, or circle toward the affected side." However, infected animals usually die within 48 hours of the symptoms appearing, and not all the sheep in the pen were affected. Others were standing outside the circle and watching, and out of 34 pens on the farm, only the sheep in one pen, number 13, were affected. Another possible explanation was offered by Matt Bell, a professor at the Department of Agriculture at Hartpury University, Gloucester. "It looks like the sheep are in the pen for long periods, and

It began with just a few sheep circling, then others joined in



this might lead to stereotypic behaviour, with the repeated circling due to frustration about being in the pen and limited," he said. "Then the other sheep join, as they are flock animals, and bond or join their friends." *nypost.com*, 17+21 Nov 2022.

BIRD FALL

On the morning of 9 November, residents of Harney and Wallowa Counties in Oregon reported hundreds of birds

falling from the sky. Casualties included 30 tundra swans, snow geese and numerous other waterfowl. Officials from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife said that the birds were not suffering from avian flu or any other infections and explained that fall was due to a lunar eclipse coinciding with a severe snowstorm the night before. This, they said, caused the birds to become disoriented and crash into the ground, power lines, telephone poles and other objects. This fails to explain, though, why only wildfowl were affected. *outdoorlife.com*. 19 Nov 2022.

falling from the sky. Casualties included 30 tundra swans, snow geese and numerous other waterfowl. Officials from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife said that the birds were not suffering from avian flu or any other infections and explained that fall was due to a lunar eclipse coinciding with a severe snowstorm the night before. This, they said, caused the birds to become disoriented and crash into the ground, power lines, telephone poles and other objects. This fails to explain, though, why only wildfowl were affected. *outdoorlife.com*. 19 Nov 2022.

WALRUS SURPRISE

Following the European tour by Wally the walrus in 2022 (FT411:4-5, 413:26-27), another, this time nicknamed "Thor", decided to come south for the winter. After first turning up in Hampshire in early December, Thor headed for the east coast and stopped off in Scarborough, where he attracted large crowds, and the council cancelled their



IAN FORSYTH / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Thor the wandering walrus seen relaxing in Scarborough, where he drew crowds and indulged in a spot of self-pleasuring.
BELOW: Ring doorbell camera footage shows clever cat Lily using her paw to ring Stefanie Whitley's doorbell.

New Year fireworks to avoid frightening him. Thor rewarded onlookers by masturbating enthusiastically then slipping back into the sea and heading for Blyth in Northumberland before leaving the UK for the Arctic. Commenting on the increasing number of walrus visits to Britain, Molly Gray of British Divers Marine Life Rescue said, "It's not very normal to see walruses down here so we imagine it is because of climate change." *theguardian.com*, 8 Jan 2023.

CLEVER CAT

When Stefanie Whitley's eight-year-old cat Lily failed to return home one night shortly after they moved to a new house in Long Island, she feared the worst. "Normally she comes home, but this time felt different and I didn't think that Lily was coming home," she said. However, four days later Lily turned up and announced her return by ringing the doorbell, a moment recorded by the Ring doorbell camera. "We all gasped. We were laughing. We were emotional. We were crying. It was a great moment," said Whitley, who believes the cat knew exactly what she was doing. "She's a very smart cat," she added. *[UPI]* 16 Sept 2022.



STEFANIE WHITLEY

TOUGH TARDIGRADES

Microscopic tardigrades have a reputation for being the toughest animal on the planet. They can survive extreme temperatures, the vacuum of space, decades without food and water and even being fired from a gun (FT385:9, 395:19, 401:21, 416:25). They do this by dehydrating themselves and turning into a small barrel-like form known as a tun, but until now, the exact mechanism that allows them to survive so long was unknown. Now, research by Takekazu Kunieda, a biologist at the University of Tokyo, has revealed their secret; tardigrades produce proteins unlike those seen anywhere

else in the animal kingdom. These turn the inside of their cells into gel, preventing their cell membranes from crinkling and collapsing when stressed, which is what kills most other living things in conditions the tardigrades survive with ease. "No such proteins have been reported in other desiccation-tolerant organisms," said Kunieda. Other creatures that can survive desiccation, such as brine shrimps (sold in desiccated form as "Sea Monkeys") mostly use sugars called trehalose to turn their cells into a glass-like state that protects them until they can rehydrate. *livescience.com*, 14 Sept 2022.

SIDELINES

WAYWARD WALLABY

After evading capture for several days, a wallaby seen wandering the Chopwell area of Gateshead on Tyneside was captured by volunteers, sedated by vets, and rehomed at Northumberland College Zoo at Kirkley Hall. How it ended up in Gateshead remains mysterious, as no zoos nearby admitted losing one and there are no known wild populations in the area. *BBC News*, 30 Oct 2022.

COFFIN SURPRISE

The Wozniak family from Baltimore got more than they bargained for when they bought what they thought was a prop coffin on Facebook Marketplace for Hallowe'en. When it arrived, it contained the ashes of a woman named Edith Crews as well as her photo, death certificate and other personal items. Having posted a TikTok video about their find they were able to make contact with Crews's family and return the items to them. *foxnews.com*, 31 Oct 2022.

FISH!

During a particularly tense game between the football teams Independiente and Racing Club in the Argentine premier league, Independiente forward Leandro Fernandez was struck in the face by a large fish hurled by a rival fan. He was knocked to the ground, but after a check-up was able to continue the match, although his team still lost. *huffpost.com*, 19 Jul 2022

DICK MOVE

The US Air Force has denied that one of its tanker aircraft deliberately took a flightpath over the Mediterranean that traced a penis and testicles opposite a Russian base in Syria after this was noticed by users of flight tracking apps. Explaining that the craft had carried out a series of complex manoeuvres, spokesperson Capt. Ryan Goss said, "While these appear to create a vulgar outline, there was no intent by the pilots or the unit to do so". Previously, two Navy aviators were disciplined in 2017 after drawing a large penis with contrails over Washington State, and two Marine flyers grounded in 2018 for a similar feat. *taskandpurpose.com*, 4 Nov 2022.



SIDELINES...

CAR-NAGE

A 45-year-old woman in St Gallen, Switzerland, left her car engine running when she got out to open the boot and forgot to apply the handbrake. The car was on a slight slope, so began to roll backwards. The owner tried to hold it back, but fell and was run over. The car then hit another vehicle and rebounded, running her over again, before hitting a kerb and running her over for a third time. The car then hit a barrier and stopped, while the woman was hospitalised with serious injuries. *theguardian.com*, 4 Nov 2022.

GEORDIE FAKE FAIL

Having been arrested on an unrelated matter, William Hickson was found to have £820 in £20 notes stuffed into his socks when searched at a Newcastle police station. They looked completely genuine, except they read "twenty poond" ("pound" in the local dialect) and all had the same serial number, earning Hickson a 23-month suspended sentence and a year-long night-time curfew. The same notes let down drug dealer Ali Hilmi, 22, who was arrested when trying to pay with one at a Burnley nightclub and subsequently found to be carrying ecstasy and cocaine. *D.Mail*, 11 Nov 2022, *Metro*, 11 April 2021.

FETCH!

Residents of Monte Escobedo in Mexico were startled to see a dog running down the street carrying a human head in its mouth. Police apprehended the animal and retrieved the head, tracing it to an ATM booth where a dismembered corpse had been left with a warning note from one of the local drug cartels engaged in a violent turf war in the town. *[AP]* 28 Oct 2022.



MARTIN ROSS

MEDICAL BAG | This month's waiting list includes a dead Irish giant and a messed up Hunter S Thompson

PEACE FOR CHARLES BYRNE

For more than 200 years, the skeleton of Charles Byrne, known as "The Irish Giant", has been on display in the Hunterian Museum in central London (FT272:16). Byrne (also known as Charles O'Brien, after the other 'Irish Giant' of the period, Patrick O'Brien; see FT319:16), who was born in Ulster in 1761 grew to be 7ft 6in (2.3m) and in the late 18th century became a celebrity in London, regularly appearing on stage to show off his prodigious height. His size was the result of an undiagnosed benign tumour on his pituitary gland, which resulted in acromegaly and gigantism. He was of great interest to medical men of the period, including leading anatomist John Hunter, and conscious of this, Byrne stipulated that when he died, he should be buried at sea to prevent them dissecting his body, at the time a fate more usually reserved for executed criminals. However, when he did pass away, aged only 22, Hunter bribed those responsible for burying Byrne to deliver the body to him for dissection instead, after which he put the skeleton on display in his museum. The ethics of this have been questioned from the start, and there have been many calls for the bones to either be buried at sea or interred in Ulster. Now, following discussions with modern descendants of Byrne's relatives, the museum has decided to take his remains off public display, and, at their request, to keep them available for bonafide medical research to "benefit the living". One of those campaigning for



LEFT: Three giants, the tallest identified as Charles Byrne and the others as twins, and six spectators including an unidentified lady and dwarf. Engraving by J Kay, 1784. BELOW: Byrne's skeleton will now be removed from display at the Hunterian Museum.

Byrne's removal from display was Brendan Holland, 70, one of his distant relatives, who lives with the same condition, although treatment has meant that his growth was arrested at 6ft 10-and-a-half inches (2.08m). Holland is believed to be the oldest

living person with gigantism. It is not known what fate is intended for the skeleton of Caroline Crachami, long displayed alongside Byrne. Known as the Sicilian Fairy, she was the first person recognised to have primordial dwarfism and died, probably at the age of nine (there is some dispute as to her actual age), at which time she was only about 8in (20cm) tall. As with Byrne, there have been calls for her skeleton to be taken off display. *BBC News*, 11 Jan 2023.

HORNY HORROR 1

A 43-year-old man in Taiyuan, northeast China was treated by urologists at The Second Hospital of Shanxi Medical University after he sought medical treatment for a "hard" and "yellowish-brown" growth on the end of his penis. It was a cutaneous horn, a growth made from keratin, the protein that makes up hair, nails and the outer layer of skin. The patient had previously had a small growth, the size of a grain of rice, removed from the end of his penis, but it had grown back to become a horn-like protrusion. This was 5.5cm by 3cm (2in by 1in) in size and extended from just under the



WELLCOME COLLECTION

HUNTERIAN MUSEUM



foreskin and past the urethra. It was smooth at the top and rough at the base, “where there were several mass-like protrusions” according to doctors. The man was diagnosed with squamous cell carcinoma, a common form of skin cancer that can appear as raised growths from the skin but was pronounced cancer-free after the growth was excised. Cutaneous horns usually form on the head and face and are often the result of skin cancer, and the man’s penile horn was only the sixth case to be recorded in 120 years, three in China and one in each of India, Spain and the US. Several of these penile horns are reported to have developed within a year of circumcision, which doctors suspect may trigger their growth. *news.com.au*, 25 Oct 2022.

HORNY HORROR 2

Mimiya Bai, a 60-year-old woman from Madhya Pradesh, India, has several horns on her head that have been growing for the last three years, causing her unbearable pain. Although some doctors who have examined her have been quoted as saying that her condition is “beyond understanding” and are said to be “stumped”, surgeon Dr Abhishek Jain says that she has a condition known as siliceous horn and that this can be treated by surgery. Because of the position of her growths, local hospitals have been unable to operate, and Bai is appealing to the government for help because her family cannot afford the cost of surgery at a large city hospital. While rare, horns like this are believed to be a result of exposure to radiation or the HPV virus following a cut on the head. *walesonline.co.uk*, 1 Jan; *iflscience.com*, 3 Jan 2022.

CANCEROUS CHRISTMAS

Patients of the Askern Medical Practice in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, received a startling message from the surgery on 23 December.



LEFT: Mimiya Bai shows her horns. BELOW: Jimsonweed, which proved too strong a substance even for Hunter S Thompson (pictured at bottom).



“They said I was trying to talk, but I sounded like a raccoon”

The text told them that they had “aggressive lung cancer with metastases” and directed them to fill out a DS1500 form in order to access benefits available to the terminally ill. An hour or so later this was followed by an apology telling recipients that the previous message had been sent in error, and that the medics had intended to wish them a merry Christmas instead. “If it’s one of their admins that’s sent out a mass text, I wouldn’t be trusting them to empty the bins,” said Carl Chegwin, a patient of the practice. *BBC News*, 29 Dec 2022.

GONZO SPINACH

Tubs of fresh spinach on sale across Victoria, Australia, had to be recalled after at least 190 people reported fever, blurred vision and delirium after eating the vegetable, with some requiring hospitalisation. “These people are quite sick,” said

Dr Darren Roberts, medical director of the New South Wales Poisons Information Centre. “The patients have been quite unwell to the point of marked hallucinations where they are seeing things that aren’t there,” he added. “They can’t give a good account of what happened.” The hallucinogenic spinach

was traced back to a farm in Lindenow, Victoria, where it was believed the crop had been contaminated with datura, a plant also sometimes known as jimsonweed or “the devil’s trumpet”. This is a powerful hallucinogen feared even by legendary drug fiend Hunter S Thompson, who described an experience with the plant in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. “I went blind for three days. Christ I couldn’t even walk! My whole body turned to wax. I was such a mess that they had to haul me back to the ranch house in a wheelbarrow... they said I was trying to talk, but I sounded like a raccoon.” *D. Telegraph*, 16 Dec 2022.

OUCH!

Every year the US Consumer Product Safety Commission updates its database of reasons for hospital emergency room visits. Among the injuries that prompted hospital visits in 2022 were a significant number of wine-inducing genital mutilations, including, “tried to ride dog, penis contusion”; “leaned forward slightly while lying in bed, accidentally discharged his .45 caliber handgun into the base of his penis”; “playing with a toy dinosaur and made it bite his penis”; “had a piercing on penis which got caught in car door”; “pain to testicles which started when he was given oral sex after he was sprayed in the eyes with pepper spray”; and “intoxicated and thought was applying sexual stimulant to scrotum and instead applied toilet bowl cleaner”. *cpsc.gov/Research-Statistics/NEISS-Injury-Data*.

SIDELINES...

MAYFLY MADNESS

The city of Yuangiang in China was brought to a standstill by a bumper mayfly season. The insects, which only live for a day or two, swarmed the city from nearby lakes and rivers, turning the streets white as if it had snowed and causing vehicles to skid on the drifts of dead insects. *Metro*, 26 Sept 2022.

WEDDING CRASHER

After arriving at the ceremony, the elephant that carried groom Anand Tripathi to his wedding in Uttar Pradesh in India was startled by celebratory fireworks and ran amok, destroying the wedding venue and overturning six cars before it could be brought under control. *Metro*, 14 Jun 2022.

TREADMILL TRAUMA

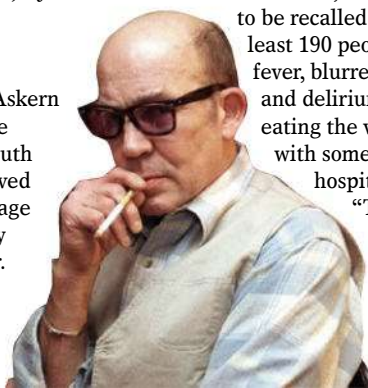
A resident of Seattle, Washington, who just gives his name as Steve, found himself \$3,000 poorer after having to shell out for vet’s bills when his ginger Maine Coon cat Rory was sucked into the workings of his Tread+ Peloton treadmill while he was using it. He managed to extract the traumatised animal, who only suffered a sprained shoulder in the incident and made a full recovery after treatment. *inews.co.uk*, 23 Apr 2021.

GRAVE OFFENCE

Authorities were mystified by the almost daily desecration of Linda Torello’s grave in New Jersey, which had continued for five years, until her son Michael Murphy installed CCTV in the Tappan Reformed Church cemetery where she is buried. This revealed that the culprit was her ex-husband who arrived almost every morning between 6.14 and 6.18am, accompanied by his current wife, and urinated on the grave. “I can’t get my wife to go out to dinner,” said Murphy, “but this guy gets his wife to go along with him to desecrate my mom’s remains every morning.” *D.Mirror*, 1 Oct 2022.

ACTUAL SUPERHEROES

When a woman ran into the new Noka Ramen restaurant in Oakland, California, pleading for help after being attacked, employees dressed as Power Rangers for an opening promotion came to her aid and apprehended the attacker, who was later arrested by police. *D.Mirror*, 29 Oct 2022.





SIDELINES...

SOFA SMASH

Returning to his hire car just 15 minutes after he had parked it on a residential street in Sydney, Australia, Herbert Xia was shocked to find that the vehicle had been crushed by a sofa that had fallen from the sky. The Toyota Yaris was left with its roof stove in and the large sofa sticking out the windscreen. Police investigating say that the piece of furniture may have been hurled off a nearby balcony during a party, while Xia says, "I have no words for this incident, I feel very lucky." *metro.co.uk*, 4 Nov 2022.

BOY BITES BACK

An eight-year-old boy named only as Deepak was playing outside his house in the Chhattisgarh region of India when he was attacked by a cobra. The snake wrapped itself around his arm and sank its teeth into the boy. Despite the pain, Deepak tried to shake the snake off and when that failed, resorted to biting it back, which killed the animal "I bit it hard twice. It all happened in a flash," he said. His parents rushed him to hospital where doctors discovered that the snake had given him a "dry bite" without releasing venom, and he made a swift recovery. *dailymail.co.uk*, 4 Nov 2022.

VAMPIRE KING

King Charles III is a distant relative of Vlad the Impaler, he revealed to actor Luke Evans at a Palace reception. It seems he is the bloodthirsty count's great grandson 16 times removed. His lineage goes through his great grandmother, Queen Mary, wife of George V, to Vlad IV, the half-brother of the original Dracula.



MARTIN ROSS

SUGGESTIVE CLOUD | UFO or "your mom showing her vagina from heaven"?



SINAN BALCIKOCA / ANADOLU AGENCY VIA GETTY IMAGES

This spectacular lenticular cloud was seen over Bursa in Turkey on 19 January. Pictures and videos quickly went viral, stimulating much online debate about the cloud, which was widely described as "UFO-like". To others, though, it looked more like a cinnamon roll or, as

many Twitter posters delighted in pointing out, a part of the female anatomy.

Many people thought that the pictures were fakes, but meteorologists confirmed that the images had not been tampered with. Lenticular clouds, which often do take

on a flying saucer-like shape, frequently form over mountains, such as the 8,343-foot Mount Uludag just to the south of Bursa, which disrupt the layering of the atmosphere creating the perfect conditions for the clouds to appear. *BBC News*, 21 Jan 2023.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY AND GET 3 MONTHS OF **VIZ** FOR JUST £3

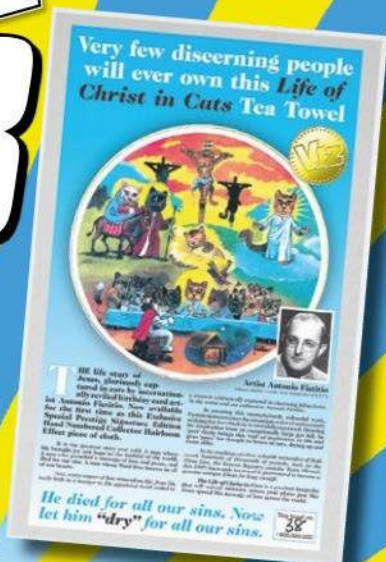
PLUS A FREE LIFE OF CHRIST IN CATS TEA TOWEL!

SAVE 11%
ON COVER PRICE

FREE GIFTS
for
SUBSCRIBERS!

**WE HATE
GOING IN
SHOPS!**

**DOWN WITH
LEAVING THE
HOUSE**



**RECEIVE YOUR FIRST
3 MONTHS FOR £3**

If you find you simply can't live without your fix of adult humour, your subscription means you pay *as little as £2.83 per issue*, instead of £3.95 in the shops.

You'll also receive a **FREE Viz** tea towel!



ORDER ONLINE TODAY AT
<https://shop.viz.co.uk/vizpxft>
OR CALL 020 8752 8195
OR EMAIL hello@metropolis.co.uk
QUOTING THE OFFER CODE VIZPXFT

The offer will automatically revert to a 6-month direct debit which will auto renew. If you wish to cancel the direct debit offer, please contact us via phone or email. You will be able to view your subscription online at shop.viz.co.uk/login

PAUL DEVEREUX unearths a lost Mayan city, mummified crocodiles and the world's oldest runestone



ABOVE LEFT: A view of the crocodiles during excavations at Qubbat al-Hawā. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Inscriptions on a sandstone rock, believed to be the world's oldest runestone, made around 2,000 years ago. **BELOW:** A LIDAR image showing part of the newly found Mayan city of El Mirador. The black lines emphasise some of the causeways.

CROCODILE ROCK

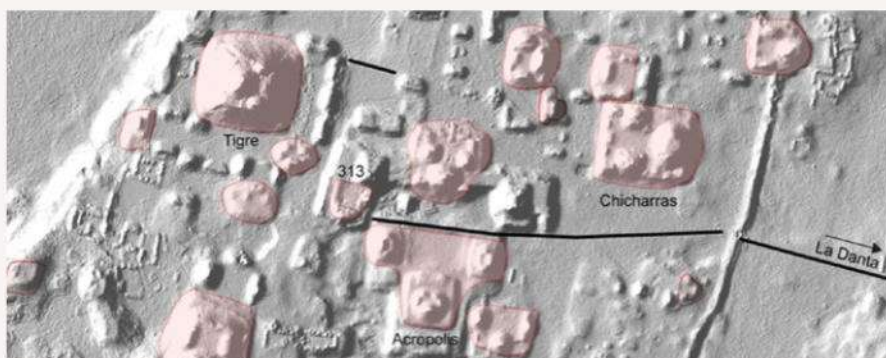
The ancient Egyptians not only mummified pharaohs and notable individuals – oh, and cats – but crocodiles too. In fact, hundreds of them. Ten unspoiled recent finds, dating to the 5th century BC, have been discovered in an undisturbed rock tomb at Qubbat al-Hawā (Aswan), allowing researchers to conduct a detailed analysis of their morphology and preservation techniques. The mummified beasts consist of five heads and five complete bodies ranging up to 3.5m (11.6ft) in length. *phys.org*, 18 Jan 2023. (Original study in *PLOS ONE*, 2023. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0279137).

THE NEANDERTHALS STILL LIVE

Swedish geneticist and a founder of palaeogenetics, Svante Pääbo, achieved a first in his discipline in winning a Nobel prize for medicine or physiology (the prize covers both fields) last October. He was being honoured among other things for what had seemed impossible, sequencing the Neanderthal genome through the extraction of ancient DNA and establishing that gene transfer between Neanderthals and modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, had occurred c.70,000 years ago. In the course of doing this work he reckons that at least half of the Neanderthal genome, perhaps as much as 60 to 70 per cent, is to be found in living humans. "Which means that in effect Neanderthals are not really extinct at all, they are in us," Pääbo says. *Guardian*, 12 Jan 2023.

LOST CITY FOUND

This is another one for our Lost and Found department – old Father Time has been terribly careless in losing quite large things,



like ancient cities. This example is an almost 2,000-year-old Mayan one, dubbed El Mirador, and lies beneath dense forest cover in Guatemala near the border with Mexico, its hundreds of settlements and interconnecting causeways extending over 650 square miles (168km²). It was found using LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) in which a plane sends down laser beams, penetrating the forest cover, and their reflected light revealing details on the ground beneath, from which an image can be formed. It is a technology that for several years now has proven invaluable in detecting similar lost structures in the Amazon and other Mesoamerican and South American forests. Platforms and pyramids in the El Mirador complex show up in the imagery along with reservoirs and canals. The ancient Mayans were clearly accomplished city planners and engineers. *Metro*, 13 Jan 2023. (Original study published in *Ancient Mesoamerica*.)

THE OLDEST RUNESTONE

In late 2021, archaeologists dug up a block of red sandstone while excavating a cremation pit near the lake of Tyrifjorden, eastern Norway. On it were engraved runic

inscriptions, the system of writing used by ancient Germanic peoples of northern Europe. Now, a great many artefacts, especially wood and stone items, have been found with runes carved on them, but in this case the runic inscriptions on the unearthed sandstone block (now dubbed 'svingerudsteinen') can be dated because the bones and charcoal in the grave pit have been radiocarbon dated. They are c.2,000 years old, making them by far the oldest runes carved on stone to have been discovered. They "may be one of the first attempts to use runes in Norway and Scandinavia on stone", according to Kristel Zilmer, an expert at the University of Oslo. But what do these ancient inscriptions say? Therein lies a bit of a problem. The Runic alphabet (futhark) derives from an even earlier system of writing, but scholarly opinion differs between Etruscan and Latin predecessors. If Latin-inspired, the svingerudsteinen carvings could refer to a family name, and a woman called Idibera. Then again, given the early age of the inscriptions, Zilmer suggests that maybe "someone was learning how to carve runes." *Smithsonian magazine*, 19 Jan 2023.



ANNALS OF THE VERY OLD

World's oldest woman dies, decrepit dogs fight for top spot, and Flossie takes the feline record

The world's oldest person, Lucile Randon, a nun also known as Sister André died in her sleep on 17 January at her nursing home in Toulon, France, at the age of 118 years, 340 days. She became the world's oldest person after the death last April of Kane Tanaka, a 119-year-old Japanese woman. Sister André had previously made the record books in 2021 as the oldest person to recover from Covid, and, although blind and a wheelchair user, continued to help care for other elderly people in her nursing home, many a lot younger than her. "People say that work kills; for me work kept me alive. I kept working until I was 108," she explained. Asked the inevitable question about the secret of her longevity, Sister André said, "Only the good Lord knows," although she had previously noted that she felt she would be better off in Heaven. Born into a Protestant family, Sister André converted to Catholicism in her 20s, eventually becoming a nun 15 years later. Despite her contemplative life, she continued to enjoy a daily glass of wine and some chocolate until her death. She had lived through two world wars and remembered greeting her brothers on their safe return from World War I, recalling: "It was rare, in families there were usually two dead rather than two alive." She remained close to her brothers throughout her life, and announcing her passing, David Tavella, a spokesperson for her nursing home, said: "There is great sadness but... it was her desire to join her beloved brothers. For her, it's a liberation." The laurels for the oldest living person have now passed to 115-year-old Maria Branyas of Spain who was born 4 March 1907. For recent coverage of super-centenarians, see **FT371:6-7, 383:10-11, 405:10, 409:10. BBC News, 18 Jan 2023.**

● In November, the world's oldest living cat was confirmed as Flossie, a 27-year-old tortoiseshell who lives in



Orpington, south London, with Vicki Green, also 27. Born in 1995, Flossie started life as a stray living close to Merseyside Hospital in Liverpool, where she was adopted by one of the hospital workers. She lived with her for 10 years before her owner's death, after which she went to her late owner's sister, who kept her for 14 years before she, too, died. Flossie then spent three years with her second owner's son before being passed to Cat's Protection for rehoming. "We were flabbergasted when we saw that Flossie's vet records showed her to be 27 years old," said Naomi Rosling, the charity's branch coordinator. "I knew from the start that Flossie was a special cat, but I didn't imagine I'd share my home with a world record holder," said Green, who adopted Flossie last August. "She's so affectionate and playful, especially sweet when you remember how old she is. I'm immensely proud that Cats Protection matched me with such an amazing cat." Flossie

has some way to go though, before she beats the record for the oldest ever documented cat; this was Crème Puff, from Austin, Texas, who was 38 years and 3 days old when she died in August 2005. For more Moggy Methuselabs, see **FT363:10-11. Sun, 24 Nov; editioncnn.com, 25 Nov 2022.**

● In southern California, Gino, a small mixed breed dog was declared the world's oldest living dog by the Guinness Book of Records on 22 November. Gino, 22, had been adopted by Alex Wolf and his housemates when they were students in Boulder, Colorado, in 2002. "He wasn't my first choice," says Wolf. "I anticipated getting a bigger dog because that's what I was used to growing up, in the mountains and coming from LA. But this little dog was kind of just staring up at us... he's been by my side ever since." Gino's sight and hearing are failing, but Wolf says that he thrives on "napping by the fire, snacking

ABOVE LEFT: Lucile Randon died on 17 January aged 118 years, 340 days. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Spike, at 23, is officially the world's oldest dog. **LEFT:** The venerable Flossie (27) enjoys a well-earned snooze

on salmon treats and riding around the neighbourhood in a wagon," adding, "We've slowed down, we just want to be sure he's enjoying our time with us."

However, just a few days later, on 7 December, Gino's record was usurped by Spike, a 23-year-old chihuahua mix from Ohio, backed up by a veterinary certification saying Spike was "at least 23 years and 7 days old". Her owner, Rita Kimball, had rescued Spike, then aged 10, after he had been abandoned in a grocery store car park. "He had been shaved up his back, had blood stains around his neck from a chain or rope, and looked pretty rough," Kimball said, but when she took him to her car, "Spike jumped right in and sat on the seat, as if he knew where we were going. It was meant to be." He was named Spike after the ferocious dog in Tom and Jerry cartoons. "Spike was a name for a large dog. My guy was small, but he had the attitude of a big dog," she added. Like Gino, Spike is nearly blind and hard of hearing, and prefers spending time with people he knows and visiting the animals on Kimball's farm. The longevity record for dogs, though, is still held by Bluey, an Australian cattle dog, who was verified as being 29 years old when he died in 1939. **Metro, 24 Nov 2022; editioncnn.com, 20 Jan 2023.**



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

281: ADOLF THE ANCIENT HISTORIAN



ABOVE: Adolf Hitler at table in the Berghof, his house on the Obersalzberg in Bavaria; did talk turn to the Roman Empire, or was it the occasion for an anti-Christian rant?

Bit of a change here, though classically underpinned.

Idea inspired by Julian Barnes's latest (at the time of writing) novel *Elizabeth Finch* (2022). The middle part is devoted to Julian the Apostate, last pagan emperor of Rome. Near the end, the narrator quotes these two passages from *Hitler's Table Talk* (21+25 Oct 1941):

"I didn't know that Julian the Apostate had passed judgement with such clear-sightedness on Christianity and Christians".

"The book that contains the reflections of the Emperor Julian should be circulated in millions. What wonderful intelligence, what discernment, all the wisdom of antiquity. It is extraordinary."

Tirades against Christianity were a constant in Hitler's disquisitions. One sometimes feels as though one were reading Edward Gibbon, especially such pronouncements as "In the ancient world the relation between men and gods was founded on an instinctive respect. It was a world enlightened by the idea of tolerance", a lead-in to anti-Christian fulminations.

What a pity we have no such table talk of Roman emperors, save for some inkings in Suetonius and Tacitus. We'd have some, had the emperors' own writings survived.

The nearest we can come is via the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180), often nicknamed 'The Golden Book', best thought of as his Commonplace Book, very popular throughout the Byzantine period and supposedly the favourite book of Bill Clinton who cannot have read very carefully its stern moral messages.

The two Roman books whose loss I most regret would have enriched us here, namely the *Memoirs* of the dictator Sulla and Nero's mother Agrippina.

In what follows, I am drawing on Bob Carruthers's *Hitler's Personal Conversations* (Pen & Sword Books, Barnsley, 2018). His Introduction clarifies the tangle of sources for Adolf's musings, himself drawing on those preserved by Martin Bormann. See also (e.g.) Heinz Linge, *With Hitler to the End: The Memoirs of Hitler's Valet* (English tr. by Geoffrey Brooks. London/New York, 2009).

There is much controversy over the sources and transmission of these conversations. The Wikipedia entry usefully details all this. Basically, what we have are Hitlerian monologues from 5 July 1941 to 1942, plus desultory records down to 1944.

In what follows, I present some of Hitler's pronouncements on ancient history and Christianity in both himself verbatim

and paraphrases of the longer monologues. I gratefully use Carruthers's translations from the German. Here and there I append a few comments. For spatial reasons, I restrict myself to 1941. It is worth noting that his ancient references rather dwindle in the 1943-44 monologues. Perhaps, as the German situation worsened, Hitler did not want to think about the decline and fall of the ancient Roman Reich?

These conversations rather resemble Plato's Dialogues, in which Socrates does all the talking, his listeners restricted to the occasional "Yes, O Socrates". Hitler's listeners rarely get a word in, always prefaced by "Mein Führer".

It should be emphasised that Hitler's *Table Talk* is miles away from the demented frothings of *Mein Kampf*. Albert Speer (post-war, of course) was most unfair in calling it "rambling nonsense". He has many interesting thoughts on diverse topics, sometimes prophetic, for example on the need to curtail the use of coal and concern for the environment.

Before beginning, there is one other matter which provides a context for Hitler's excursions into antiquity. Namely, the Nazi obsession with Tacitus's *Germania*, their bible. Himmler was especially caught up with this. He sent a special SS force to the Italian estate of Aurelio Balleani to seize

ULLSTEIN BILD VIA GETTY IMAGES

the *Codex Aesinas*, discovered there in 1902, thought to be a copy of the original *Germania* manuscript. They did not find it, Balleani having transferred the treasure to another estate. It is now in Rome. Hitler was sufficiently interested to ask Mussolini to give Germany the manuscript. Il Duce initially agreed, but backed down in the face of public protests.

For the full story, see Christopher Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus' Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich* (New York, 2012). Also, both online, Adam Kirsch's 'Ideas are Viruses' and Kacper Walczak's 'Himmler and Germania', respectively on the *SLATE* and *IMPERIUM ROMANUM* websites.

5 July 1941: "The Fascist movement is a spontaneous return to the traditions of ancient Rome." True, in the sense that the term 'Fascist' derives from the rods and axes (*fascēs*) carried by Roman officials as a mark of office.

11-12 July 1941: "The Roman Empire, under Germanic influence, would have developed in the direction of world-domination... the result of the collapse of the Roman Empire was a night that lasted for centuries." He continues for some time in the same vein.

On this same occasion, Hitler reflects that "On tasting the soup of the people of Schleswig-Holstein, it occurred to me that the gruel of the Spartans cannot have been very different." This alludes to the notorious Spartan 'Black Broth', a concoction of boiled pork and blood, flavoured with salt and vinegar. In spite of many ancient mentions, no precise recipe survives – various websites offer modern re-creations. An Athenian visitor tried a spoonful and immediately spluttered that he now understood why Spartan warriors were not afraid of death.

21-22 July 1941: Walking with Mussolini, Hitler felt "I could easily compare his profile with one of the Roman busts and realised he was one of the Cæsars" – exactly what Il Duce thought of himself. A little later: "The Roman Empire is a great political creation, the greatest of all." There follows a long comparison between the Pantheon in Rome and the one in Paris, to the latter's inferiority.

8-10 August 1941: "I've just heard that the armies of ancient times had recourse to meat only in times of scarcity, that the feeding of the Roman armies was almost entirely based on cereals." In Heinz Linge's version, Hitler laughed as he recalled when "Roman soldiers were compelled by hunger to eat meat" – this being an exact translation of Tacitus, *Annals* 14. 24. Many modern vegetarians, notably *FT*'s Mat Coward, are embarrassed by this unwanted connection (so, too, are non-smokers) and are reluctant to believe it. But, the evidence of this Table Talk and other sources is overwhelming. There is really no cause to get one's knickers in a twist. The young Hitler *did* eat meat, the adult one was a fanatic vegetarian.

14 October 1941: In a long disquisition

on religion, replete with anti-Christian tirades, Hitler observes "the ancient world was divided between the systems of philosophy and the worship of idols", a generalisation that contains some truth.

19 October 1941: "The reason why the ancient world was so pure, light and serene was that it knew nothing of the two great scourges: the pox and Christianity." Twaddle, of course; Adolf is wearing very rosy-coloured spectacles here.

21 October 1941: Adolf is here at his maddest, claiming Jesus was not a Jew but the product of sex between a whore and a Roman soldier. A great deal follows about Paul's supposed determination to destroy the Roman Empire, plus a lurch into Rome's being so influenced by the Germans that they became enamoured of fair-haired women, leading to Roman women hastening to dye their hair – *Olay!*

25 October 1941: After claiming that Christians destroyed ancient libraries – a garbled reference to their many denunciations of 'immoral' pagan literature and destruction of particular books, Adolf continues: "I don't believe at all in the

truth of certain mental pictures that many people have of the Roman Emperors. I'm sure that Nero didn't set fire to Rome. It was the Christian-Bolsheviks who did that."

Suetonius and Dio Cassius unequivocally blame Nero for the arson. Tacitus left it an open question between imperial guilt and accident – fires were common in the city. Hitler would have been much taken by the notion of JH Bishop in his *Nero: The Man and the Legend* (1964) – I heard him expound it in a lecture, we then being colleagues at the same Australian university – that the fire started by accident, then Christians who believed it to be God's doing began to spread the fire, these being seen and arrested by the Praetorian Guard.

Spatial considerations apart, there is another reason why Hitler's exculpation of Nero makes the perfect ending. There is a possible/probable subtext here, namely the 1933 Reichstag fire, blamed on the Communists but widely thought to have been perpetrated by the Nazis themselves. Thus, Hitler in acquitting Nero may be acquitting himself.



ABOVE: The Reichstag burns in 1933: did Hitler get the idea from Emperor Nero?



Animal dreams and nightmares

New research may not surprise pet lovers, says DAVID HAMBLING, but is a wake-up call for science

Dreams are one of the few unexplained phenomena familiar to (almost) everyone from first-hand experience. Dreams certainly exist, but what about something which no human has experienced: animal dreams? For science, the question is not as clear-cut as you might first think.

"It would appear that not only do men dream, but horses also, and dogs, and oxen; aye, and sheep, and goats, and all viviparous quadrupeds; and dogs show their dreaming by barking in their sleep," Aristotle wrote in his treatise *The History of Animals* in the fourth century BC.

Any cat or dog owner will tell you their companion is dreaming of chasing rabbits or mice as their paws and whiskers twitch. These look like a more expressive version of the REM (Rapid Eye Movement) phase in human sleep which was shown to correspond to dreaming phases in the 50s simply by waking the sleeper up and asking if they were dreaming.

Science is cautious about accepting Aristotle's observation. Nineteenth-century British psychologist C Lloyd Morgan coined a rule known as 'Morgan's Canon', which says that animal activity should not be "interpreted in terms of higher psychological processes if it can be fairly interpreted in terms of processes which stand lower in the scale of psychological evolution and development."

The Canon warns against anthropomorphism and assuming animals think like people. Twitching paws may be automatic reflexes with no associated mental activity. It is a sound principle, but makes animal dreams frustratingly difficult to prove.

In the 1950s, French researcher Michel Jouvet used an electroencephalograph (EEG) to discover intense brain activity during REM, which he termed 'paradoxical sleep': the body is inert, but the brain appears to be as active as during waking life. A form of paralysis known as atonia prevents us from acting out our dreams.

Jouvet found that removing part of a cat's brainstem negated this paralysis. The cats moved their heads as though following objects, behaved aggressively, arching their backs and fighting invisible opponents, and moved as though stalking prey. Science finally confirmed what pet owners had believed all along.

By 2007, MIT scientists were able to track activity in a part of the rat brain called the hippocampus which forms and encodes



Young elephants appear to relive traumatic experiences afterwards in nightmares

memories. They initially looked at activity while the rats were trying to solve a maze puzzle, and then when the rats were asleep. They found the same patterns of activity, in sufficient detail for the researchers to infer which parts of the maze the rats were negotiating in their dreams. The implication was that the sleeping rats were working on the maze problem, much as humans consolidate memory and understanding during sleep.

A study of zebra finches at the University of Chicago showed that they are not born able to sing, but learn to do so. Young sleeping birds showed the same pattern of brain activation as when they practised their songs awake, suggesting that the learning process was continuing in their sleep. We do not know whether animals have eureka moments and wake up with a solution to a problem, but it looks as if they get the same benefit as humans from sleeping on a problem.

Science is also exploring more extreme cases. Almost all animals, including invertebrates, go through cycles of activity and inactivity corresponding to sleep. In terms of brain activity as seen by the EEG though, actual deep sleep seems to have evolved with amniotes which includes reptiles, birds, and mammals. REM sleep has been found in all mammals and birds, but not all reptiles. Recent research found evidence of REM sleep in Australian dragons, which indicates that it first evolved in some common ancestor of reptiles, birds and mammals perhaps 300 million years ago. But octopuses, which have complex

brains, also appear to have REM sleep.

Birds and mammals are warm blooded, regulating their body temperature, and this seems to correlate with more time in REM. Birds only experience REM in short bursts of a few seconds, whereas mammals dream for much longer. Does this hint at some difference in mental processes? We can only guess; but research showing some birds are as intelligent as mammals (see **FT263:16**) suggests that a different kind of thinking may be involved.

Even after Jouvet's work, though, psychologists avoided talking in terms of animals dreaming.

"There are literally thousands and thousands of publications on the sleep of so many different species, and yet virtually none of them in the 20th century mention the word dream, dreams, or dreaming," David Peña-Guzmán, author of a new book *When Animals Dream*, told NPR.

Peña-Guzmán believes that this reluctance is symptomatic of attempts to avoid the issues of animal consciousness. His thesis is that dreaming is a key aspect of cognition, and that animal dreams are a sign that they have an internal mental reality as humans do. He believes that dreams are connected to emotional or affective consciousness, arguing that all dreams are fundamentally emotional. The dreamer is not a disinterested spectator.

Peña-Guzmán quotes studies of young elephants who have witnessed family members killed by human poachers for their tusks. The young elephants appear to relive the traumatic experience afterwards in nightmares, an effect strongly akin to post-traumatic stress disorder in human disaster survivors. The parallels are hard to deny.

Dreams are not particularly associated with higher cognition. Rationality is suspended in human dreams as the dreamer moves unquestioningly through a world filled with impossible things. But dreams are directly associated with experiencing and feeling, and the evidence suggests that animals are strikingly similar to humans in their dreaming.

As Peña-Guzmán notes, the latest findings on animal dreams will not come as much of a surprise to pet owners – but perhaps they will be a wakeup call for scientists, and help to chip away at the barrier erected between humans and animals. Ultimately, they may expose a perhaps unwelcome truth that we are not so different as we may like to think.



WHAT'S THAT NOISE? | The Halifax Hum continues to drive residents to despair, while mystery booms and pulses shake homes from Tampa to Turkey

THE HUM ENDURES

The mysterious humming that has been plaguing the Holmfield district of Halifax, West Yorkshire (FT415:8), is no closer to being tracked to its source after an investigation by Calderdale Council. The Hum, described by one local resident as a “low-frequency sound that resonates through everything in the house”, has been disrupting people’s lives in the area for more than three years. The council said: “Despite all efforts, officers are unable to evidence a statutory nuisance or to identify the source of the alleged noises. In addition, the noise consultant’s independent investigation came to the same conclusion. Based on the outcome that the Council and the independent expert reached, the Council has closed the complaints made by local residents pending any new evidence.” This has not pleased those who feel their lives have been ruined by the sound. Yvonne Conner, who claims The Hum has driven her close to a nervous breakdown, called the conclusion a “crock of s***” and said: “The independent consultant used the exact same equipment as Calderdale Council, so she was always going to have the same results!” Meanwhile, The Hum continues. The council says: “We’re happy to restart our investigations if any new evidence comes to light... and will act on any new findings from national research into low-frequency noise.” For a personal view of what might underlie The Hum, turn to Jerry Glover’s Forum article on p49. *Examinerlive.co.uk*, 6 Oct 2022.

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER

Tampa, Florida, residents have had a similar level of success when it comes to pinning down the source of a mysterious bass pulse that has been ruining their sleep late on Saturday nights and into the early hours of Sunday morning. It has been described by Tampa resident Abbi Reynolds as “a deep vibrating, bass sound, you can



ABOVE LEFT: The hum hotspot of Holmfield, Halifax. ABOVE RIGHT: Meydandere in eastern Turkey has been rocked by booms.



feel it when your head’s down on the pillow.” Reports of the noise have been made from the length of the Tampa peninsula and out to the offshore islands. “It seems like everybody has kind of the same experience where it’s this eerie – am I really hearing that? It’s weird,” said Zach Reynolds, another local. Police have been unable to pin down the source of the pulse, and nearby MacDill Air Force Base confirmed that there were no exercises happening that could generate the sound, while the local party boat charter company confirmed none of their vessels was responsible, as they all dock by 11.30pm. Locals have been banding together on social media to try and triangulate the source, while police have been considering sending out search parties on foot to try and find the culprits, but so far to no avail. *foxnews13.com*, 12 Dec 2022.

MYSTERY EXPLOSIONS

Over a period of several weeks, residents of the small town of Llanfairfechan in Conwy, North Wales, were repeatedly woken by mysterious explosions at around 4am. One resident said it “sounded like bombs going off – all the dogs were barking and birds were flying in panic. It scared me.” Various ideas have been put forward to explain the sounds, including railway works, lightning strikes, quarry blasts and fireworks, but Town Clerk Jayne Neal said, “It’s a complete mystery. I live in the town and

I’m certainly aware that it’s been happening – but I’ve no idea what’s causing it.” Police promised extra patrols to try and find the source of the bangs, but do not seem to have succeeded. *dailypost.co.uk*, 18 May 2022.

WHAT LIES BENEATH?

Villagers in Meydandere and Akyayla, in the province of Siirt in eastern Turkey, have been repeatedly disturbed by subterranean booms and rumbles seeming to come from under their villages during the night. Sabri Yildirim, from Meydandere, said, “I have never heard such horrible sounds in my life. I heard them at midnight, at 1am, 2am, and they were definitely from the depths of the Earth”. Villagers also say that the sounds are accompanied by tremors that shake their homes. Local leader Necmettin Baykara said: “They come from the deep. All houses are shaken. We thought at first it was an earthquake, but there was no earthquake in any nearby place. Then we thought they may stem from trucks carrying material to construction sites, but there is no construction of any kind near our village.” Umayittin Aygün, from Akyayla, said the sounds were “similar to an explosion,” adding, “I thought it was an earthquake, but there is not the slightest crack on the walls or elsewhere.” Sadık Akti, another Akyayla villager, said, “I have experienced an earthquake in the past and I know how it is. This was not an earthquake.”

A team from the government’s Disaster and Emergency Management Authority investigated, but could find no obvious source for the noises, although suggested they might be caused by underground water movements. *dailysabah.com*, 31 Jul, 11 Aug 2022.

FINALLY!

In the northern Greek city of Thessaloniki residents spent months being spooked by a resonant booming noise seeming to come from underground, with locals describing the sound as deafening and otherworldly. One local said: “When we are at the spot where it is especially loud, we feel as if there is someone hitting the earth from the inside... We are all afraid because we don’t know where it’s coming from. There are people who wake up from the noise early in the morning, at 2 and 3am. Yesterday, I myself was awake at 5:30am and I heard it.” After weeks of speculation and investigation, the source was finally located. Agis Papadopoulos, the President of the Thessaloniki Water Supply Authority, said they had traced the sound to the routine tuning of the water supply running through the neighborhood of Meteora, where the sound had been loudest. “Imagine that the water flows through the pipes like a wave. If there is some anomaly in the flow, the contact between the water and the pipe can produce a sound,” he said. *greekreporter.com*, 18 Jan 2022.



Ann Treherne: Dunblane to Conan Doyle

ALAN MURDIE tells the fascinating story of a Scottish businesswoman's visionary experiences

Scotland has a longstanding tradition of spontaneous psychic experiences – so-called ‘second sight’ – and of mediumship. Lest we imagine such communications from the Beyond are things of the past, the story of Ann Treherne of Edinburgh over more than a quarter of a century is both fascinating and instructive, not least judging by the results.

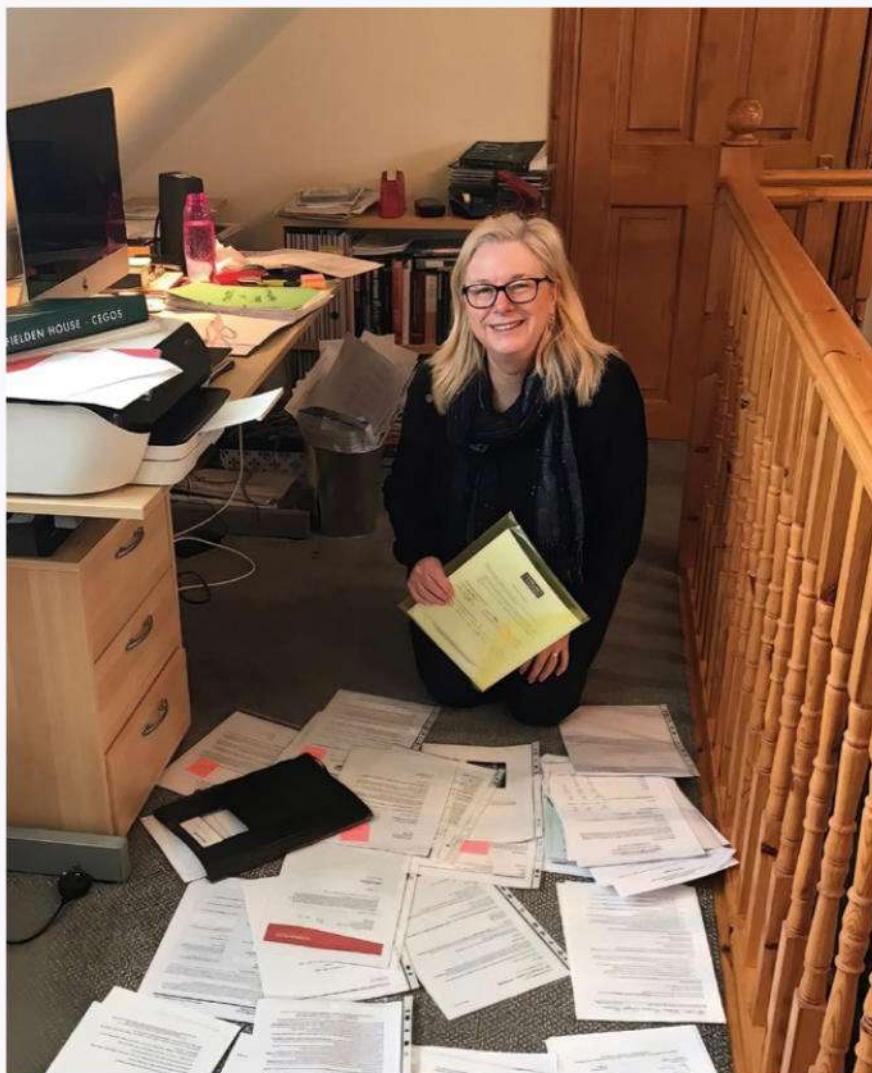
The story begins with a traumatic psychic vision and culminates with the foundation of a remarkable and flourishing spiritual establishment, the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre in central Edinburgh.

In early 1996, Ann Treherne was a dynamic careerwoman immersed in the finance world, eventually commanding the post of chief executive in that industry. At that time, she was head of business development of a major Scottish building society. She was responsible for retailing within the chain of business branches, an altogether unlikely background for psychic adventure. Even more improbable was the actual location of her first traumatic psychic impression, the M8 motorway between Edinburgh and Glasgow. While behind the wheel of her car, Ann was hit by the first of a series of intense and disturbing mental visions showing slaughtered “dead bodies strewn around”.

Over the next few weeks, these profoundly troubling images repeatedly rose up into her consciousness. Curiously, they manifested while she was at work, but never at night during dreams. They were increasingly accompanied by an urgent sense that she was being compelled to “tell someone” or “do something” in response. By Friday, 8 March 1996, this urge had become so overwhelming that she felt forced to confide in a colleague at work.

By this stage her disconcerting images had crystallised into a powerful vision. The scene was somewhere in Scotland, inside a two-storey building with large windows and many desks, with people being shot down at random by a rampaging gunman armed with multiple firearms.

The initial fear of Ann's colleague was that the scene of carnage was set to occur at the head office of their company, based upon the features of the building and their immediate connection. Together they discussed alerting their management. Fearing it could jeopardise many professional relationships, Ann decided against this.



ABOVE: Ann Treherne, the Scottish businesswoman whose visions and premonitions led her to explore mediumship and to found the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre in Edinburgh.

This sharing of her vision proved cathartic. Over the next few days the visions disappeared entirely, much to her relief. Then, on the afternoon of Wednesday, 13 March 1996, just as she got into her car to leave work, Ann heard over the radio the appalling news of the mass shooting at a primary school in Dunblane, near Stirling. A deranged gunman called Thomas Hamilton entered the school on a murderous rampage, firing off multiple guns, killing one teacher and 16 children and leaving a further 15 children seriously wounded.

Deeply traumatised, Ann broke down in tears overcome by shock and a sense of guilt; she admits to having little recall of the next few days. Her reaction matched the national mood. The entire country was shaken; the Prime Minister, John Major, went to the site and wept. Laws restricting possession of handguns duly followed.

After several days of oblivion, on the following Monday, Ann felt she had to return to work. Her arrival was met by the piercing and hostile stare of her colleague in whom she had confided. Burdened by a continual sense of guilt at not having acted

COURTESY SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE CENTRE

in some way to try and avert the tragedy, Ann's reaction was to retreat into herself. She reduced her contacts with all staff as much as practicable, eventually leaving her job altogether.

However, after work she also engaged in sincere efforts to make sense of her experiences. She began studying precognition as well as experiencing further premonitions. Eventually – and undoubtedly a relief for her conscience – she began to wonder if a higher purpose lay behind her premonition, an impression strengthened after a positive meeting with Professor Archie Roy (1924-2012) and Tricia Robertson from the Scottish Society for Psychical Research. This led her into contemplating mediumship as a reality, firstly joining and then hosting a Spiritualist circle herself. Then in 2006, after a persistent sense of being directed from a higher power, Ann ventured into founding a mediumistic group herself. This she did, even though the messages received seemed to be going against her own instincts, as initially the group was intended to be dedicated to physical mediumship.

Very early on in its sittings Ann began perceiving mental images of “a big man, elderly, quite distinguished looking with grey hair and a moustache”. This presence repeatedly returned, followed by a series of (at first) random images and short messages, all felt internally rather than seen or heard. These encompassed the impression of a doctor, views of Edinburgh University, shelves of books, the Knights of the Round Table and finally an image of Sherlock Holmes. Eventually, it dawned on her and the circle members that these disparate images formed a pattern of clues pointing to the communicator, the man with a moustache being Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930).

Thereafter followed a series of communications which Ann has extensively documented in a book, *Arthur and Me* (2020), with an introduction by another former president of the Society for Psychical Research, Professor Chris Roe of Northampton University. Some physical phenomena in the form of table-turning followed, including full levitations of the table and objectively recordable raps and sounds. A series of remarkable synchronicities was logged. These eventually led to the founding of the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre as a permanent legacy of the group.

One might, and should rightly be, sceptical about declarations of the return of any person, especially a literary celebrity. On his death in 1930 Doyle was hailed as the greatest convert and propagandist for Spiritualism the movement had ever recruited. But could such a claim of Doyle



ABOVE: Children and adults gather outside Dunblane primary school, Scotland, shortly after the shooting of 13 March 1996, one of the deadliest mass murders in UK history.

“There are 10,000 deceased members of the SPR – but they don’t communicate!”

returning be true? Just months before his death he resigned from the SPR after 36 years, complaining that: “For a generation, since the death of Myers and the end of the Piper sittings, the Society has done no constructive work of any importance, and has employed its energies in hindering and belittling those who are engaged in real active psychical research” (*Journal of the SPR* (1930), vol 26 pp45-46).

Doyle was convinced of the reality of personal survival and frustrated by the scepticism of scientific researchers. Unsurprisingly, following his passing, vocal proclamations arose concerning his post-mortem return within Spiritualist circles. This was certainly in marked contrast to the claimed performance of deceased psychical researchers. I recall veteran researcher Tony Cornell making the point at an SPR lecture in January 1994: “There are at least 10,000 deceased members of the SPR – but they don’t communicate!” (*Paranormal Review*, 1994, pp20-21). Early communications were received from a medium, Elizabeth O’Hare, then by Doyle’s own wife, who stated she met him on the astral plane. (‘Spirit Guidance from Conan Doyle – His Wife Testifies to his Nearness’, *Psychic News*, 31 Oct 1936).

A Spiritualist clergyman, the Revd Charles Tweedale, averred he owed his life to the spirit of Conan Doyle, in that the great man materialised shortly before he felt forced to undergo a risky medical operation. Doyle, a doctor, persuaded him against it. Had this occurred in a Roman Catholic setting, Doyle might have been on the way to canonisation.

In 1953 from Australia came reports that Doyle possessed a direct voice, medium Eric Tozer, with his resonant Scottish tones being channelled and broadcast via a Melbourne radio station. His messages covered “a number of questions concerning his eventful life on Earth... his interest in politics, the colour bar, medicine and criminology he touched on at varying length and he also referred to his prowess in sport, for he was a first-class cricketer and could give a good account of himself as a heavyweight boxer”. (*Psychic News*, 7 Feb 1953). These communications largely reflected facets of Doyle and his opinions which were well-known or could be inferred, as well as consistent with his physical accomplishments in the flesh (ones not necessarily shared with the majority of more academically inclined SPR members but perhaps helping explain why Conan Doyle did not readily disappear from this mortal plane).

Such communications have continued ever since; at least one medium in the 21st century is currently claiming the same, as well as communications with Stephen Hawking and Mother Teresa.

Thus, a degree of scepticism may be in order. But three things strike me about



LEFT: In 2006 Ann Treherne began receiving visions of “a big man, elderly, quite distinguished looking with grey hair and a moustache” – it turned out to be Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

the questions.

For a seer with a personal involvement, these are no mere abstract concepts. It is not unusual for such natural clairvoyants to also witness apparitions, often in symbolic form. For experiencers they are a terrible burden. In his autobiography, *The Long Banana Skin*, entertainer Michael Bentine stated that while in the Royal Air Force during World War II he developed the uncanny ability of discerning the airmen destined to die in action, seeing a skull super-imposed across their faces. Later, Bentine received forewarning of the death of his son in a plane crash in 1971, and foresaw the death of his friend, Tory politician Airey Neave, killed by a bomb at Westminster in March 1979. When such premonitions prove true it is a doubling of pain.

Reading Ann's book and reading her account directly from her, I recalled the admissions of a psychic lady, Mrs AM Osbourne of Tollesbury in rural Essex, to James Wentworth Day around 1969: “As I get older I'm sometimes frightened by the things I can see in people's eyes and things I know will happen. This curse has been in my family since at least 1800... I pray constantly it will die with me... I can hear ghosts and can tell when they are present in the house, but I keep quiet about this” (*Essex Ghosts*, 1973, by James Wentworth Day).

Secondly, prior to her immersion in Spiritualism, it is notable that Ann Treherne enjoyed a comfortable and thoroughly successful career in company administration, accounting and banking. She had high status and occupied a position of importance. She was raised within a Presbyterian household and her father was a Church Elder who was opposed to occultism. Prior to her experiences, Ann herself had thought mediumship ridiculous and distrusted it. She had never read any books by Conan Doyle. She even disliked Sherlock Holmes detective stories and the film versions in particular.

At a stroke her story demolishes the social-function theory of mediumship beloved of anthropologists, which proposes mediums are women compensating for low economic status, seekers of attention in a patriarchal society or mental slaves to the culture within which they are born and raised.

Most significantly, her account is backed with testimony and independent

this story when viewed in its totality, no matter how materialists, or my own innate scepticism towards certain matters, may encourage the rueful wagging of heads.

What makes the whole story exceptionally interesting is that Ann's own background was not one that would be expected to catapult her into mediumship. Firstly, her testimony is in keeping with a centuries-old tradition that the emergence of psychic abilities in daily life is unwelcome. In Scottish folk culture, the power of second sight – the ability to foresee events before they happen, frequently ahead of tragedies – was often regarded as tantamount to a curse. Reading her book makes it clear that she was wracked with guilt, the tormenting

Her account is backed with independent corroboration and a trail of evidence

sense, however unrealistic, of ‘What if?’ – that she could have acted or intervened in some way to avert a tragedy (a theme you can find everywhere in supernatural literature, from Dickens's *The Signalman* to Stephen King's *The Dead Zone*). Such problems of predestination and causality have taxed philosophers for centuries, though seldom with any individual stake in

corroboration and a consistent trail of evidence pointing to actual events. A recognition of this emerges in the fact that Professor Chris Roe rates the story among the most impressive of the last 150 years of Spiritualism. The point here is that Professor Roe has actually addressed the testimony (as I have), and Professor Lance Butler has reviewed the actual tape recordings. A prima facie case certainly can be made, so far as we can confront the objective-subjective boundary that most of modern philosophy and science currently adopts in approaching such events.

Thirdly (and this is purely a personal response), one judges a tree by its fruit. The Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre opened on the 2 October 2011. Situated at 25 Palmerston Place in Edinburgh New Town, close to the Episcopalian Cathedral, it provides a functioning spiritual centre, the premier Spiritualist and psychic meeting place in Scotland today, operating as a non-profit charity with its mission to make a community space accessible to everyone in which to nurture their own physical, mental and spiritual well-being and gifts. It offers workshops, classes, talks, therapies and private sittings with mediums from a variety of traditions, including shamanism. It increasingly reaches a worldwide audience via on-line events and provides a place where people of differing beliefs can meet without fear or favour, a welcome thing in an increasingly polarised world.

One can make of this whatever one wants, and according to one's personal 'boggle factor'. Notably, the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre is remarkable in the erudite and intelligent interest it has attracted in the 12 years since its foundation. Its backers include a number of scholars and forward-thinking intellectuals deeply interested in exploring these topics, taking an evidence-based approach.

Their involvement is a reminder of a long-standing aspect of the heyday of Spiritualism when it drew many Victorian and Edwardians into its practice, but all too often forgotten since Doyle died in 1930, though there have been some notable examples such as Professor G Wilson Knight (1897-1985) and astrophysicist Dr Raynor Johnson (1901-1987). The centre contains two extensive libraries, including that of the Edinburgh Theosophical Society. And appropriately, there are hints that small portions of it may be haunted, or at least attracting an active 'presence'.

Finally, I am reminded by way of free association of how a dramatic vision of



ABOVE: The Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre opened in 2011 in Palmerston Place, Edinburgh, with "a mission to make spirituality accessible to everyone".

flowing blood leading to an inspirational movement is not without parallel in British psychic history. A most dramatic example appears in the journal of George Fox (1624-1691), the founder of Quakerism.

Upon seeing the spires of Lichfield in Staffordshire as he passed by in the winter of 1651, Fox was overcome, stricken by

what he felt was the power of God. He immediately pulled off his shoes and washed his feet in a ditch and then, in his stocking feet, marched into Lichfield market place. Here he was immediately overwhelmed by a shocking vision "like a channel of blood down the streets and the market place was a pool of blood." Upon seeing this, Fox waded into it and began loudly and repeatedly crying out "Woe unto the bloody city

of Lichfield! Woe unto the bloody city of Lichfield!" continuously to an astonished public.

Fox felt his vision had come from God. Later he learned that during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian a thousand Christian martyrs perished in the town and believed his vision had been sent as a message "to raise up the memorial of the blood of those martyrs that had been shed above a thousand years before and lay cold in their

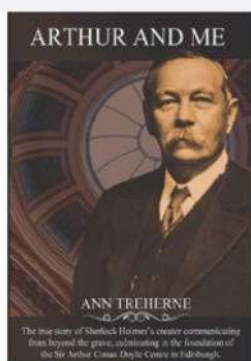
streets". (*The Journal* by George Fox)

Today, some who credit the genuineness of his vision are inclined to interpret it as a retrocognitive experience of a historical event, or at least that he tuned into a potent local belief in the presence of the minds of the community that the town was built upon the site of a massacre. Subsequently, various Lichfield locations have been proposed for the site of the massacre of hundreds of converts and followers of St Amphibalus in AD 300, including the Christian Fields nature reserve, Burcop Hill, or ground by the Cathedral. There are sketchy reports of numerous bones discovered in the area in the 18th century, but this cannot constitute proof. Fox might have looked into the past; in the case of Ann Treherne, she was afflicted by a spontaneous perception of the future.

The story of Fox does remind us that inspiration can result in the foundation of whole faiths and lasting institutions. As Stan Gooch stated in *The Paranormal* (1978), what a marvellous example to psychics today to follow their intuitive impulses!

Currently, Ann is working on a second book detailing more of her own experiences and those of others at the centre. I think it will be worthy of serious study.

See: www.arthurconandoylecentre.com





KARL SHUKER digests the implications of two more disappearing Thunderbird photos

MORE VANISHING PHOTOS

In a recent 'Alien Zoo' [FT427:20-21], I documented a remarkable report from an American Facebook friend, Kimberly Poepppey, who claimed not only to be an eyewitness of the infamous 'lost' thunderbird photograph, as numerous other people have too, but also – and uniquely in my experience at that time – to know for certain which publication she'd seen it in! This was a Reader's Digest hardback compendium volume published in 1982 and entitled *Mysteries of the Unexplained*. But here is where it became really strange. Kimberly clearly recalled seeing the photo in that volume several times, even looking at it in a bookstore before her boyfriend finally bought the book for her in 1983. During the 1990s, she went to a Fortfest convention where a number of people told her that they'd had the photo in a book or periodical too, but that it had now vanished. When Kimberly returned home, she opened her Reader's Digest book and flipped to the page containing the photo – except that it didn't any more. It was gone, replaced by a different photo and different text that made no mention of the photo. What had happened? Kimberly suspects some sort of time-slip because she knows that it had been in that book – she'd looked at it in there so many times.

Since my report of Kimberly's testimony appeared in FT, I've received additional thunderbird photo eyewitness reports from readers; two are of particular interest as they too claim to have seen it in the same book.

Eyewitness #1 is Simon McInnes from the UK, who on 17 January 2023 emailed me the following:

"I too have a recollection of seeing it in the Reader's Digest hardback book of fortune issues (and have also remembered it as such, even when the image seemed to have disappeared completely and was being treated as mythical/Mandela effect). I did not own a copy, so do not have one to hand, but when we were visiting a family friend, I was able to browse their copy. It always seemed to be a very thick tome, with most entries covering one or two pages. It was interesting to see the theory of one person that time had changed. Some might argue that it supports the 'living in a computer simulation' theory, and the loss of the original page 165 was somebody applying a bug fix!"

Eyewitness #2 is Jacqueline Steel from the USA, who emailed me her experience on 16 January 2023:

"I feel the same confusion as Kimberly.



I know I saw the same photo she describes as seeing in a Reader's Digest book. This was back in the 1970s, pre-photo-shop and pre-computer fakery. My memory is of seeing an old black and white photo of around 5-6 men/farmer types (not soldiers – although one or two may have been shouldering hunting rifles). They were standing around, and behind them was a large pterodactyl, spread out and nailed to a weathered barn side. I even remember the photo caption saying this was taken in the 1860s or 1880s, and the guys had seen and shot the pterodactyl out in the 'wild' west somewhere. Proof that dinosaurs could still exist in remote hidden valleys etc.

"A bit of background... I thought I'd seen the photo in the Reader's Digest book *Strange Stories, Amazing Facts*. I received this as a birthday present around 1977 when I was aged 11. It would have been too expensive for me to buy myself, so it was a prized possession and I read it over and over from cover to cover, and I still have my book today. I recently re-checked the 'Strange and Bizarre Stories' pages, and of course there is no 'Thunderbird' photo to be seen. Then I read in your column that others had said it was actually the Reader's Digest book *Mysteries of the Unexplained*. My elder sister had this book, as did my older cousin. I suppose it's entirely possible that I borrowed the book to read, and actually saw the photo in there. But I'm seriously beginning to wonder if the photo has become a kind of socially shared 'tulpa' that has now attained a life of its own. Or did we all have a Jungian collective imaginary memory?!"

The Reader's Digest compendium *Strange Stories, Amazing Facts* has been published numerous times, but its first American edition apparently came out in 1975, which accords chronologically with Jacqueline's original thought that she'd seen the photo in it during 1977, whereas

LEFT: Reader Andy Kelly wrote to share this photo he found on Reddit. "I set off following other curious seekers of the image, which Mr Shuker said was 'of a giant killed bird (or pterodactyl) attached to a barn with wings outspread and some men (often said to be veteran soldiers), standing beside it'. While Kimberly Poepppey remembered "a pterodactyl... attached to the side of a medium-sized out building... [with] 4 or 5 men... [in] regular clothes" This image appears to fit a part of the description given by Ms Poepppey, although it features considerably more than the '4 or 5 men' she remembered." Sadly, it's a fake, exposed by Karl Shuker a few years ago in a ShukerNature blog article: <https://karlshuker.blogspot.com/2016/10/phoney-photos-of-thunderbird-and.html>

Mysteries of the Unexplained may have been too late, as I can't find details of any edition that preceded the early 1980s. So if it was indeed a Reader's Digest volume in which Jacqueline saw it, her first thought was correct after all. This means that whereas we can eliminate her as an eyewitness to the photo's alleged former presence in *Mysteries of the Unexplained*, she apparently did see it in *Strange Stories, Amazing Facts*, only for it to vanish subsequently from its pages in the same way that it did from the other Reader's Digest compendium. Coupling this with Kimberly's statement that people at Fortfest had experienced the very same thing with other books and publications, I wonder if these alleged vanishings of the photo all happened at the same time?

The big assumption with all of this, of course, is that the memories of these three eyewitnesses, including Kimberly, are accurate. Yet they all seem sure – adamant in Kimberly's case – that they did see the photo in one of these two RD compendia, only for it to disappear from them later. If correct, this bizarre situation seems to go beyond the Mandela Effect as an explanation, and into the realms of time-slips from one timeline into another, and even, as suggested by Simon, bugs in a *Matrix*-style computer simulation in which we are all unknowingly living. It would be very interesting to track down the earliest claims that such a photo had been seen in a published work but had since vanished from it. This would help to pinpoint when this phenomenon (whatever it entails) began. Meanwhile, talk of time-slips and a *Matrix*-style of existence suddenly makes the cosy world of cryptozoology start to seem rather less cosy!

My thanks to Kimberly Poepppey, Simon McInnes, and Jacqueline Steel for kindly sharing their thought-provoking experiences with me and permitting me to document them in Alien Zoo.



GEO-ILLOGICAL

The Democratic Republic of Congo has probably not discovered vibranium and a ground-breaking fossil find is actually an old beehive

REAL-LIFE VIBRANIUM?

In January a couple of videos went viral claiming to show “electric rocks” discovered in the Democratic Republic of Congo. One showed a closeup of someone touching the two rocks together to generate an electric spark, while the second showed him connecting wires to a rock and using it to power a small lightbulb. The videos first appeared on the Facebook page of the Mohamed First University in Oujda, Morocco, with a one-word comment saying “lithium?” Lithium is used in batteries, but it is highly reactive and only exists as compounds in its natural state, and even as a refined metal doesn’t act like the rocks in the video. Once the videos went viral there was speculation that a mountain of these rocks had been discovered and claims that they would soon solve all of Africa’s energy problems; the stuff was likened to vibranium, the fictional mineral from the Marvel Universe that can store and release energy and powers the Black Panther’s African kingdom of Wakanda. Some, though, pointed out that these could just be one of the various types of rock known to be piezoelectric, which can produce small sparks when stressed, although they would not be capable of lighting a bulb. Commenting on the videos, Dr Ikenna Okonkwo, a geology lecturer at the University of Nigeria, says that the rocks look more like zinc or lead ore that would not be able to power a bulb, and while there is a slight chance they could produce small amounts of static electricity, the whole setup looks like “some kind of trick”. Professor Stuart Haszeldine of the School of GeoSciences at Edinburgh University agrees, saying, “I have never seen anything geologically like this and suggest the rocks are connected to electrical power sources not included in the tightly framed video images.” The Mohamed First University has not responded to requests for comment. *BBC News*; *spookygeology.com*, 26 Jan 2023.



ABOVE: The viral videos showed the Congolese “electric rocks” being attached to wires and apparently powering a small light bulb.

CORE!

Yi Yang and Xiaodong Song, researchers at Beijing University’s School of Earth and Space Science, have published a paper in the journal *Nature Geoscience* saying there are indications that the Earth’s inner core has recently stopped rotating and may be in the process of changing its direction. The inner core is made of solid metal and is 75 per cent the size of the Moon. It is located 3,000 miles below our feet, sitting within a liquid outer core that allows it to rotate. The intense pressure at such depths means its temperature is equivalent to that at the surface of the Sun. Yang and Song believe the core’s rotation changes due to complex interactions between gravity and electromagnetism and say they have evidence that there is a periodic cycle that sees it reverse direction every 60 to 70 years. This “may imply dynamic interactions between the deepest and shallowest layers of the solid Earth system,” they say, as there are unexplained climatic and geological phenomena that have similar cycles, which the core reversal could be driving. These include the oscillation of global mean temperatures and sea levels, and small variations

in the length of the day. Yang and Song reached their conclusions by using seismic data collected from decades of earthquake records, analysing traces of seismic waves that had refracted through the core. While the core’s movement influences the Earth’s magnetic field, the changes in its rotation are not associated with flips in the Earth’s magnetic poles, which occur on timescales of tens of thousands of years, not decades, and contrary to the plot of the apocalyptic 2003 film *Core*, the change will have minimal effect at the surface. *vice.com*, 23 Jan 2023.

NOT WHAT IT SEEMED TO BEE

The discovery of a fossil of the primitive organism *Dickinsonia tenuis* at the Bhimbetka Rock Shelters cave site near Bhopal in India was hailed as a major breakthrough in a paper published in the journal *Gondwana Research* in 2020. The find, widely reported in the media, showed that the creature was present in India when the subcontinent was part of the supercontinent Gondwanaland and helped date its formation to around 550 million years ago. However, scientists carrying out follow-up research said, “We

visited the site in December 2022 and found the evidence for *Dickinsonia* lacking,” adding that the specimen had also “seemingly decayed significantly,” which is “quite unusual” for a fossil. Professor Joseph Meert, who led the new research, said: “The fossil was peeling off the rock.” Close examination of the alleged fossil also revealed that it was not part of the rock at the site, but was instead “attached as a tracery of waxy material” above its surface and contained “honeycombed structures”. As a result, Meert concluded that “the impression resulted from decay of a modern beehive which was attached to a fractured rock surface which, at first glance, resembles *Dickinsonia*”. He published his findings in a paper called “Stinging News: ‘*Dickinsonia*’ discovered in the Upper Vindhyan of India not worth the buzz”, after which the authors of the original paper retracted their findings. Palaeobiologist Rob Sansom said: “Therein lies the cautionary tale for all palaeontologists: Pareidolia, the tendency to perceive a specific, often meaningful image in a random or ambiguous visual pattern.” *independent.co.uk*, 3 Feb 2023.

THE C NSPIRASPHERE

When German police foiled the Reichsbürger plot last year, it briefly made international headlines. **NOEL ROONEY** disinters the strangely vanishing tale of an unlikely threat to democracy...

SCREW THE PUTSCH

Kaiser Heinrich XIII of the Fourth Reich was always going to be a long shot. Even if you buy the contentions of the Reichsbürger movement – that the Second World War never officially ended, because no peace treaty was signed between Germany and the Allied powers; that Germany as currently constituted is not a sovereign state but rather a corporate entity created by the war's victors; and (presumably) that the Volk are eager to throw off the yoke of the foreign oppressors – the idea that a handful of individuals, however committed (or perhaps in need of committing) could raise two hundred divisions of paramilitaries and storm the ramparts of falsity, was, at the very best, quixotic.

In early December last year, the German police carried out what they described as the largest raid in their history. Over three thousands officers conducted raids on over 100 properties across the country, looking for arms, ammunition, literature, and other evidence of the coup attempt. Eventually, 25 people were detained, including Heinrich XIII Reuss, the putative king in waiting.

As for the weapons and materiel, it was a bit of a mixed bag. Initial reports spoke of a 'number' of pistols, swords and knives; not, in retrospect, necessarily adequate to the alleged ambitions of the coup plotters. Nonetheless, Germany's gun laws, which are already among the tightest in Europe, were further strengthened in the wake of the raids.

Talking of mixed bags, some of the key personnel in the plot were, in any realistic appraisal, somewhat eccentric. Along with the unfortunate Heinrich,



The group would struggle to make up two full football teams

there was Birgit Malsack-Winkemann, a judge and former parliamentarian representing *Alternativ für Deutschland*; Ms Winkemann was apparently slated to be the minister for justice in the new government. Another interesting pick was a celebrity chef, Frank Heppner; Heppner, an expert in oriental fusion cuisine, was allegedly going to run the movement's canteens, according to an Austrian news outlet.

Quite how thousands of ultranationalist fighters would take to oriental fusion rather than *Wiener schnitzel* was not explained; perhaps because *Die Presse* was more concerned with Heppner's daughter, who is the partner of a famous Austrian footballer, David Alaba. Alaba, and indeed Shalimar Heppner, his partner, are both mixed race; so the media interest was straining the context a little, if not crossing lines of prurience.

There were, no doubt, a few serious individuals in the cabal. Germany's police force and army have long been seen as a haven for far-right sympathisers, and in the last

20 years or so, there have been a number of sinister incidents involving serving personnel, some of them with fatal repercussions. But once you count off the Kaiser, the judge, the chef, and (apparently) the stray Russian national, the number of potentially active (and therefore dangerous) members of the group would struggle to make up two full football teams. Perhaps that's why *Die Presse* was promoting Mr Alaba's connection.

The strangest aspect of the affair, for this writer at least, is that the story went – as far as the German media were concerned – from massive existentialist threat to nothing-burger in a matter of 10 days. By mid-December, it had more or less completely disappeared from the media landscape. This is peculiar, given that the media were all over it, to the extent of being present for live-action reports of the raids. Perhaps it's simply a matter of job well done by the security apparatus, but it does feel a little like a 'move along, nothing to see here' response. Particularly when the German interior minister, Nancy Faeser, was quoted as claiming the country was "fighting back against the enemies of democracy".

Democracy has its enemies; of that there is no doubt. And conspiracy theorists are collectively seen as such by many in the Establishment, even if the majority of the population is more likely to label them as harmless loonies. Perhaps the coup plotters really did believe that, armed with a few swords and exotic dishes, they could dismantle the state apparatus. The state apparatus certainly seems to have believed in them. That belief is, it transpires, far from universal.

LEFT: Cooking up a conspiracy? Celebrity chef Frank Heppner.

Some commentators have expressed suspicion that the whole affair was either a case of overkill on the part of the authorities or, worse, a set-up. And it's not just the conspiracists who think so, although the C-sphere cried foul first. There have been mutterings from journalists on all sides of the political divide.

The dilemma for those in authority is clear: should they ignore a potential plot to take over the country, even if, on the face of it, it's palpably absurd? Having said that, there is something of the PR boondoggle about the way the security people went about it. Media were invited to some of the raids, names were released early, and the feeble cache of weapons was put on display without any apparent embarrassment.

It makes me wonder if the constant over-egging of conspiracy theory as a threat by opportunistic politicians, and their chums in the media, has begun to warp the collective mind to the extent that folks like Heinrich XIII actually look dangerous. The C-sphere has a different take, naturally; they point out that the German security forces have form when it comes to fitting up would-be revolutionaries. Back in 2003, an operation against the ultranationalist National Democratic Party collapsed when the court determined that at least thirty of the party's most prominent people were in fact government agents or informers.

<https://news.sky.com/story/celebrity-chef-frank-heppner-is-suspect-in-german-far-right-coup-plot-according-to-reports-12765272>

<https://thegrayzone.com/2023/02/02/state-security-germanys-far-right->

A BIZARRE MIX OF MUSIC VIDEOS, CONSPIRACY THEORIES, UFOS AND THE PARANORMAL!

CRYPTIDS
FIRST CONTACT



TIME TRAVELLERS
OAK ISLAND

Every Tuesday 9pm on Sky TV Channel 186

RAYOZAT

JUST WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES TODAY'S HOMES SO DIFFERENT, SO APPEALING? FORTEAN TIMES MERCH, OF COURSE.



www.moretvicar.com/collections/fortean-times

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Voynich Manuscript developments, Lord Lucan sightings and Japan's Killing Stone strikes again

ARCHANGEL IDENTIFIED [FT424:9]



The man who refused to give his name and repeatedly insisted he was the Archangel Raphael when he appeared in court in Lisburn, Northern Ireland, charged with damaging a police van, has finally been identified as 24-year-old Phillip Smith from Drogheda. He claimed to have "levitated over from Spain to Dublin and up to Northern Ireland", but when released on bail said he "would just get the train" back to Drogheda, where he would stay with a friend. *belfasttelegraph.com*, 17 Jun 2022.

WOLFEAR [FT424:10]



Zeppet, the Japanese company that created an ultra-lifelike collie costume for a man who wanted to live as a dog, has now gone one better and created a costume to enable a customer to transform himself into a wolf. "My order to 'look like a real wolf walking on hind legs' was difficult, to say the least, but the complete suit looked exactly like what I imagined," said the satisfied customer, who spent £18,700 on the transformation. *ladbible.com*, 29 Dec 2022.

THE VOYNICH MANUSCRIPT [FT130:42-46, 381:4]



The mysterious Voynich Manuscript continues to defy attempts at producing a convincing reading of its bizarre script and enigmatic botanical illustrations, but scholars have made progress towards tracking down its origin. The name "Voynich Manuscript" is a relatively recent one, being derived from Polish antiquarian and book dealer Wilfrid Voynich who rediscovered the manuscript in 1912 at the Jesuit College at Frascati near



ABOVE: One very satisfied customer: "The suit looked exactly like what I imagined."

Rome, but radiocarbon dating of the vellum upon which it is written suggests it originated somewhere between 1404 and 1438. However, it does not appear in the historical record until 1639, when Prague alchemist Georg Baresch wrote a letter to Jesuit linguist Athanasius Kircher that included a copy of some of the odd characters that make up the manuscript's text in the hope he could translate them. He couldn't, but wanted to buy the book. Baresch wouldn't sell, but when he died his friend Jan Marek Marci inherited the manuscript and forwarded it to Kircher, accompanying it with a letter that mentions that it had at one point been bought by

Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (who reigned from 1576-1612) for 600 ducats, an immense sum, considering at the time the Emperor's entire annual library budget was equivalent to 1,000 ducats. The book, however, cannot be identified in any of the records relating to Rudolf's library so it has not been clear whether he really owned it, or whether Marci was mistaken.

Now, though, Stefan Guzy of the University of the Arts Bremen, Germany, has made a discovery that increases the likelihood that the book was in Emperor Rudolf's library and traces its probable ownership back further. He took a different tack, and rather than looking at

library records he combed the imperial account books of the Hofkammer (Imperial Chamber) in Vienna and Prague to see if he could find any book-related transactions for 600 ducats. "If there was any transaction involving 600 gold coins, then the chance was pretty high that this acquisition was the one mentioned in the Marci letter," Guzy says. He was lucky: there was only one book purchase for 600 ducats, a collection of "remarkable/rare books" bought from a physician named Carl Widemann, so it is likely the Voynich was one of these. This is strengthened by the associations of Widemann himself: he lived in the home of Leonard Rauwolf, a 16th century Bavarian physician who was the first Western botanist to collect and document the flora of the Near East, and a book like the Voynich, with its wild plant illustrations, would have been of interest to him. Widemann inherited Rauwolf's books, and it is likely that these were what he was selling to the Emperor. As a result of Guzy's work it is now possible to place the manuscript more firmly in Rudolph's library and to identify Widemann and Rauwolf as its probable two previous owners; while this doesn't identify the original source of the mysterious book, it takes us closer. *ceur-ws.org/Vol-3313/paper16.pdf*.

THE KILLING STONE KILLS [FT418:18-21]



In March last year a famed rock in a volcanic area of Tochigi prefecture in the mountains of Japan caused consternation by splitting in two. Known as the *Sessho-seki*, or Killing Stone, this landmark was supposed to have an evil nine-tailed *kitsune* fox spirit trapped inside it and was reputed to kill anyone who touched it. In December, the shattered stone caused further disquiet when a group of eight wild boars (three adults and five piglets) were



ABOVE: Japan's Killing Stone has been living up to its name.

found dead around the remains of the stone. Japanese Twitter users reacted to the deaths by saying "I thought it was just superstition and stories, but it can seriously kill," and "Something has awakened." However, even before breaking in two, the stone spewed toxic gases as it is situated in a highly active volcanic zone, so it is likely that the animals died from inhaling hydrogen sulphide rather than falling foul of an evil spirit. The gas is heavier than air, so accumulates at ground level, and this makes animals particularly vulnerable to its toxic effects according to Satohiko Zensoji from the local Nikko National Park Nasu Office. He has previously found the corpses of foxes and other small animals near the stone, but admitted he'd never seen a boar killed before. *japantoday.com*, 19 Dec 2022.

LORD LUCAN [FT426:4-5]



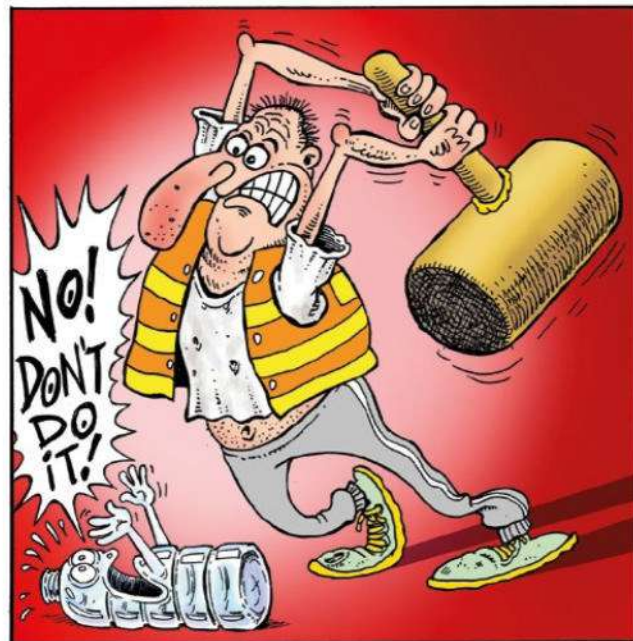
The recent media excitement about the facial recognition software "identifying" an elderly Australian Buddhist as Lord Lucan and the revelation that he left three possibly significant Cluedo cards in the car he abandoned in Newhaven has prompted other people to come forward with Lucan-related information. Previously, it was believed Lucan had left Newhaven on a cross-channel ferry, as there was no record of any other boat leaving the port at the time.

Now, Graham Amy, a former Mayor of Newhaven, has come forward to say that his father-in-law, Sid Clark, who was harbour watchman on the night of Lucan's escape, told him that a mysterious blacked-out boat had left the harbour that night. Clark noted the departure in the harbour log and later reported it to police officers, but told Amy that the page in the log was later torn out and that he believed this had been done by the police. Amy believes, as did his father-in-law, that the mysterious boat was smuggling Lucan out of the country and that its departure has been covered up. In addition, Australian cartoonist and writer Reg Lynch went public with an extremely tall tale of meeting a mysterious man called "Lucky" in a pub in an unnamed town in County Clare, Ireland, pub while on holiday there in 2001. The man dropped a trail of not-so-subtle hints about his identity and gave Lynch a postcard to send to former Australian prime minister Paul Keating on his return home. He also suggested that Lynch should visit a cricket ground in the town of Lucan on his way to Dublin the next day, a suggestion he did not follow up, but he came away with the strong suspicion that his drinking companion had been Lord "Lucky" Lucan. Such tales abound for everyone from President Kennedy to Dadaist provocateur Arthur Cravan and should probably be taken with a massive pinch of salt. *D.Mail*, 12 Aug; *smh.com.au*, 12 Nov 2022.

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

266: SQUASH BOTTLES



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

It's a myth that you should squash your plastic bottles before putting them out for recycling. Or – it's a myth that you shouldn't.

The "truth"

This is a myth about a myth – and also about the myth being a myth. Years ago, when we first started recycling cans and plastic bottles, we all knew that we were supposed to crush them, so that they would take up less space in the recycling bank or lorry. In recent years a story has been going about that this was a myth, and that you should leave them alone. Subsequently, a counter-myth has arisen, claiming that that myth is itself a myth. The fact is, both are myths, because it all depends on where you live. If your local authority collects "co-mingled" waste – all types of waste mixed together – then you should not crush, because the Materials Recovery Facility to which the stuff is sent may sort different materials partly by their shape; if you've flattened your can, it could be misidentified by the technology. However, if your waste is sorted into different types (either by you, or by the recycling staff during kerbside collection) you should crush, because that will save space in the lorry. In case you feel all that's not complicated enough, as the UK moves to adopt a high-tech version of the old bottle deposit scheme it will be important not to squash plastic bottles, as the automated collection machines will pay out according to the bottles' barcodes which could be distorted by crushing.

Sources

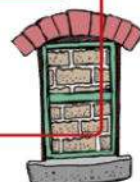
The Rubbish Book, by James Piper (Unbound, 2022); <https://metrowaste.co.uk/should-i-crush-tin-cans-for-recycling>; www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/delayedrecycling/#

Disclaimer

Whatever you do, don't take our word for it – check with your local authority as to whether they are pro-squashers or anti-squashers. Or, indeed, neutral on the matter.

Mythchaser

Did people between the 17th and 19th centuries really brick up their windows in order to avoid paying Window Tax?



NECROLOG

This month, we bid sad farewells to a multi-talented, drum bashing academic and FT contributor and to an ever-helpful polymath of the FT and Fortean Forums

DEAN BALLINGER

The first time I met Dean Ballinger, I asked him to join my band.

I already knew who he was of course; he was a star of the University of Waikato's radio station Contact FM, known for his forthright opinions, absurdist parodies of commercial radio phone-in contests and frequent lapses into toilet humour (I later came to realise that Dean was a nervous public speaker and would break out the sheep-shagger jokes as a kind of defence mechanism).

By the time I approached him about being in my band, I had been scouting Dean for several weeks, watching him play drums in his mates' bands at the campus pub. Clearly untrained, Dean would bash ferociously, leaving such bourgeois concerns as setting the tempo to other band members. His playing was a triumph of passion over skill, difficult to hate and impossible to ignore. It was exactly what we wanted for our all-instrumental outfit, since our biggest fear was being treated as "background music". Dean was happy to give us the exact opposite fear for the duration of the band's existence.

We all had silly stage names, so Dean enthusiastically came up with "Dirk Thrust" for himself (after Dirk Benedict from *Battlestar Galactica*).

Within two years, I ended up flat-sharing with Dean and his mate Richard, both Film Studies majors, in a house completely covered with movie posters they had pilfered from their day job at Video Ezy. As the non-film nerd, I was enthusiastically indoctrinated with weird, terrible and brilliant films like Ken Russell's *Lisztomania* and John Boorman's *Zardoz*.

One evening, Dean and I realised we had both loved *Arthur C Clarke's Mysterious World* as kids, as much for the content as for the scary



ABOVE LEFT: Dean Ballinger. ABOVE RIGHT: Randy Whitaker.

synthesiser music. As soon as I mentioned this, Dean dashed into his room and retrieved a dogeared, neon green paperback: *The Occult* by Colin Wilson. I was a mere dabbler in matters of the weird compared to Dean.

One birthday, a bunch of us crafted a custom gift for him: A box labelled "I Can't Believe It's Not A UFO – Hoax Photography Kit", containing a disposable camera, metal lampshade, string and a packet of sparklers. The lampshade was duly hung from the clothesline, sparkler lit, spun, and appropriately blurry photos produced.

Dean and I brainstormed ideas for his planned screenplay based on John Stuart's UFO *Warning!* a classic UFO book from our hometown of Kirikiriroa, both of us realising that Stuart's invisible hostile forces could have been a manifestation of our community's view of his living with a much younger woman in the 1950s.

When I started to get into recording other bands, Dean pitched me *Lumière*, his musical solo project with songs inspired by mid-20th century ufology. Dean had no idea about technical matters, so I would record him playing the drums and keyboards and try to find sound effects to match nebulous descriptions like "underwater".

Then it was time to record

vocals and that's when I learned that as well as being a musician, writer, entertainer, comix artist and academic, Dean was also a really good poet. Although he drew on the expanded vocabulary of a career academic, his poems were vital, present and sincere, the big words adding flavour and exoticism rather than distance. Even though we were both fans of iconoclastic "outsider" art, and theoretically too self-aware to actually produce any, Dean's sincerity and focus pushed through the cynicism barrier and yielded an album as genuine and charming as it is strange.

Whatever we said to him that night in 1996, it worked, and *The Hollow Grinders* ended up being Dean's longest running musical project. We played our last show 24 years later in November 2020, the same night Dean retired from drumming due to his worsening MND symptoms.

That bastard illness Motor Neurone Disease. It took Dean away from us in pieces. First we lost him as a public speaker and educator, then we lost him as a musician, then an artist, finally as a writer. The one thing he was right up to the end was Dean, the husband, dad, mentor and mate who we all miss every day.

Dr Dean Ross Ballinger, conspiracy theory expert, occult historian, musician, teacher, poet, writer, radio DJ, filmmaker,

cartoonist and painter; born 5 Nov 1974, Te Awamutu, New Zealand; died 30 Aug 2022, Kirikiriroa, New Zealand, aged 47.

Andrew Dean

RANDY WHITAKER

The term Renaissance man is overused, but in the case of Dr Randall Whitaker it can be employed with some justification. An engineer, draughtsman, professional musician, television cameraman, editor and lecturer, Randy was a polyglot polymath with an astounding breadth, depth and scope of knowledge from the mundane to the bizarre – indeed there seemed to be nothing that he knew nothing about.

Born in 1951 in Bristol, Virginia, he was a straight A student, earned a college scholarship and spent his late teens and 20s in a variety of technical and artistic roles while studying. According to his friend Tom Rotenberry, Randy was also a talented musician, playing keyboards with a number of bands. His academic career led him to Sweden in the late 1980s, where he worked as a Systems Analyst at the Swedish Agency for Administrative Development and eventually became an Assistant Research Professor in the Department of Informatics at the University of Umeå. On his return to the US, he became a technical and development consultant for the Air Force Research Laboratory at, of all places, Wright-Patterson AFB (yes, I asked him, and no, he didn't) also working with Northrop Grumman. His CV read like something from Tom Clancy.

In 2004 he joined the then young Fortean Times Message Board with the username EnolaGaia – a pleasing pun that transpired to have a deeper significance: his father had been involved with the Manhattan Project. It became clear that he was a goldmine of knowledge

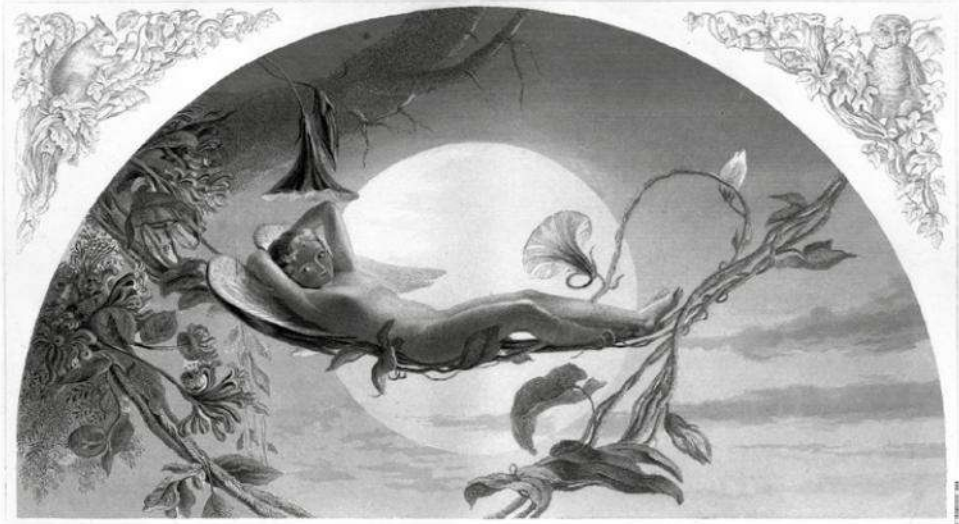


with an ability to relate context to anecdote to evidence. This and his technical experience made him a potential moderator, a role he happily took on in August 2018, playing an integral part in our migration to the Charles Fort Institute later that year and running much of the technical side (he was also a moderator on a truckers' site, the Toyota Tacoma Forum, performing the same functions).

Perhaps his greatest Wild Talent was his ability to find things. According to Tom Rotenberry: "He was known to show up at a gathering of friends where everyone had been searching in tall weeds for hours trying to find a lost item of value and he would walk straight to it and pick it up. He found my high school class ring on eBay. It had been lost for 50 years." On the board, this talent manifested in finding citations: his skill was unparalleled and a glance at the forums today will turn up myriad examples of requests for lost evidence followed in short order by an immaculately composed reference from EnolaGaia, delivered not with a triumphant "found it!", but rather an understated "Is this what you were looking for?" Of all the denizens of the fortean net, he was the most Jeevesian.

Towards the end of 2022 he was admitted to hospital and was shocked to learn that he had suffered multiple heart attacks within one day. Two weeks of in-patient treatment followed, before he returned to his Ohio home for Christmas, where he sadly suffered a relapse over New Year and passed away. The subsequent outpouring of shock and condolence on the Fortean Forums is testament to his popularity, his kindness, and his wisdom. And on a personal level, though we never met in person, I will deeply miss a very good friend and colleague. Farewell, EnolaGaia: Finder of Lost Things.

Dr Randall D Whitaker, engineer, academic and moderator, born Bristol, Virginia, Oct 1951, died Ohio 1 Jan 2023, aged 71.
Stu Neville



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

ABANDONED ROOKERIES

"The rookery abandoned? Why there'll be a death in that family before too long!" For generations it has been believed in Britain that rooks leaving their nests portend a death in the family of the garden or grounds where they live: rooks are social birds that often nest in their thousands. I've been gathering together examples of specific instances of such deaths. Here is one from the 1870s: "A naturalist... states that a medical gentleman of his acquaintance being in attendance upon a lady during her last illness, someone observing that she had not long to live, said to him, 'I wonder whether the rooks will leave the rookery on this occasion? They did so on the decease of the late ____ (the former possessor), and likewise on that of his brother who preceded him.' The birds in the present instance did quit the house, but 36 hours before the death."

Many of these instances are rather unconvincing or are based on anecdotal material. For instance, the writer above quoting a naturalist quoting a doctor makes this a third-hand story at best. In a 1903 account from Hampshire the rooks abandoned their broods just before Lady Ashburton died: only a routine look at the newspapers from that year shows that Lady Ashburton died several hundred miles away before the nesting season began! There are also, though,

more convincing-sounding accounts. Take this from 1905: "A case of the kind came under my observation at Heworth, York, last season, when the old-time village rookery was suddenly vacated without any apparent cause. Shortly afterwards there died the little 'heiress' of the house under whose ægis the rook colony had prospered; and Mr Crombie, the governor of Elmfield

Cottage, to whose trees the same rooks were traced also died about the same time." Coincidence? Probably. What about this one from 1926? "A friend of mine lived in a house... At the back of the house were a number of trees in which the rooks built their nests regularly during the first six years. On the seventh year no nests were built. The following winter my friend's daughter died. In the eighth year, and during the five succeeding years, the rooks returned and built regularly. On

the 13th year they again deserted and during that year my friend's wife died. The rooks returned the following year and continued to build for three years, when they again deserted. That year my friend died."

Is there any non-supernatural reason for such abandonments? One explanation given in the Victorian and Edwardian period was that the birds could smell death! The dying man, woman or child gave off an odour that the rooks found unpleasant.

Simon is co-presenter of the *Boggart and Banshee* podcast.

IN A 1903 ACCOUNT
THE ROOKS
ABANDONED
THEIR BROODS
JUST BEFORE
LADY ASHBURTON
DIED



Assessments and reassessments

NIGEL WATSON rounds up the latest fancies, fads and fallacies from the world of UFO research

UAP ANNUAL REPORT

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence finally released its first unclassified Annual UAP Report on 12 January 2023. It notes that “there have been 247 new reports and another 119 that were either since discovered or reported after the preliminary assessment’s time period. This totals 510 UAP reports as of 30 August 2022.”

Many of the new reports could be explained as Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) entities (26 cases), presumably drones, balloons (163 cases) or airborne clutter (6 cases). Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that many came from US Navy and US Air Force aviators and operators, and the report states these cases are potentially a safety threat to air traffic and possibly craft launched by adversaries.

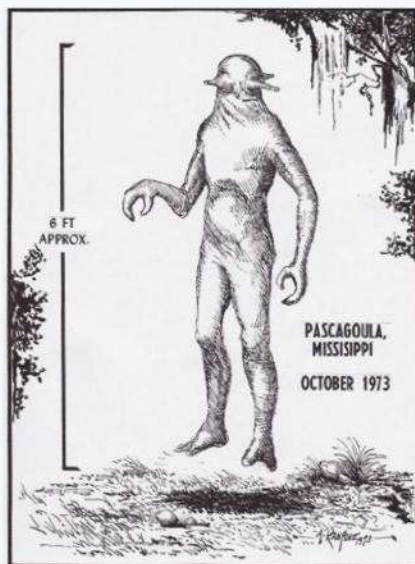
Much of the report is concerned with administration and methods for collection and analysis of data. This is no simple task, as the resources needed just to identify a light in the sky can include considerable time and skill. And even when a light or UAP is identified as something mundane, a star or balloon, that doesn’t always satisfy those who actually saw the UAP, let alone the less sceptical ufologists. Even now there is much debate over classic cases that are many decades old.

In the past, in the UK, we had the Project Condign report that claimed UAPs could be plasma balls and enabled the Ministry of Defence to drop their official investigations of UFO cases. Likewise, the USAF’s Project Blue Book was eagerly closed after the Condon Report concluded there was “nothing extraordinary about UFOs”. After the initial excitement of recent UAP videos and research has passed, I think it is likely that on sober reflection this will be seen as a moment of madness that at its core had nothing to do with hypersonic, non-terrestrial craft, or the babblings of those exposed to Skinwalker Ranch, and everything to do with terrestrial drones, computer glitches and the fallibilities of human perception. Just saying!

www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Unclassified-2022-Annual-Report-UAP.pdf

ADVOCADO

I have great respect for the work of Jacques Vallée, who published two scientifically-oriented UFO books in the 1960s, namely *Anatomy of a Phenomenon* and *Challenge to Science: The UFO Enigma* (with Janine Vallée). The low point of his UFO involvement was the publication of *Trinity* with Paola Leopizzi Harris in 2021. It concerns a UFO crash case



LEFT: One of the Pascagoula aliens – or was it a crewman from a Russian mini-submarine?

in 1945 of an avocado-shaped craft seen by some boys in New Mexico.

Amazingly, the US Department of Defense’s All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) was originally instructed to prepare a report on all previous government investigations of UFOs dating back to 1947; it was pushed back to include the Trinity incident at the behest of Vallée’s friends in DC. These might have included Christopher Mellon, former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, who regarded the incident as “fresh reason to believe that our government is concealing physical proof of alien technology”.

Sceptics called the story something out of a *Flash Gordon* strip, leading one reviewer to observe: “Trinity is an unfocussed, raggedly-composed, eye-rolling credulous mess of a book.” Certainly, its evidence is very flimsy and it shows how uncritical even high-ranking officials are when assessing UFO cases

ALL CHANGE

Now that official organisations are beginning to research UAPs, there is less room for amateur sleuths to be involved with major investigations. Some might think their work is done, in that officialdom has taken on this task, or they might seek out more obscure or esoteric cases that the scientific community is unlikely to contemplate.

Take Keith Basterfield’s ‘Unidentified Aerial Phenomena – scientific research’ blog, in which he has decided to divert his attention to assessing classic Australian sightings, such as those at Westall (1966), Mundrabilla (1988), and Valentich’s sighting and disappearance (1978).

Having posted 1,238 individual blog entries since 2009, Basterfield is also taking the opportunity to look at more recent cases and to examine classic global UAP cases, and to catch up with reading or re-reading UFO literature and podcasts.

The good news is that although he is not posting any more blogs, the existing posts will remain freely available. Not only is there plenty of information here, but Basterfield puts it into a logical order and adds useful comments about the data.

<https://ufos-scientificresearch.blogspot.com/>

ABDUCTION RESEARCH ABDUCTED

UAPs are the hardcore, scientific aspect of UFO research, but how do alien abductions fit in? We have some sympathy for Sacha Christie’s viewpoint, as posted on her Facebook page on 13 December 2022:

“There’s no evidence of Abduction because nobody is looking for any. Who’s taking blood, urine, skin, hair samples? Who’s visiting homes and investigating ground zero? Who’s doing that? Nobody.

“So until people have actually looked, start saying ‘There’s no evidence because we don’t look, we don’t ask, we don’t visit, we don’t sample, we just decided it’s too far-fetched and that’s that’. You won’t find what you are not looking for. You wouldn’t even know what to look for. You wouldn’t know the person’s usual hormonal base line. You wouldn’t know anything about us. You talk about us but not to us. You just decided it was too far-fetched. That’s not scientific, academic – it’s not even logic. It’s just you thinking you know something you couldn’t possibly know. That’s not even intelligence – it’s arrogance.”

IT WAS A SUBMARINE!

Through the efforts of Philip Mantle, the Pascagoula, Mississippi, abduction incident of October 1973, has been re-investigated. Although the two witnesses were thoroughly examined and interviewed at the time, no physical evidence has come to light. The latest explanation comes from laststandonzombieisland.com where the writer, who grew up in Pascagoula, suggests it was caused by a Soviet mini-sub and its two-man crew who emerged from the craft to spy on US Naval vessels. <https://laststandonzombieisland.com/2022/06/16/goula-sub-sighting-of-sorts/>



Hypnotic regressive?

JENNY RANGLES remembers working with the late Harry Harris and their disagreement over hypnosis

The death in late 2022 of Harry Harris – a man well known in the UFO world in the latter part of the 20th century – has left me with conflicted thoughts.

Although I knew him well for a decade or so, and was at many of the investigations that he funded, we were really never much in tune on UFO theory. But I am not sorry I was present for many cases, and he was mostly responsible for the 1980 Rendlesham Forest case making the front page of the *News of the World* in 1983. I was present at all the negotiations, and there is no doubt he was both a skilful lawyer and a great negotiator. Over the last two decades of the 20th century, Harry and I grew further apart. He and I clashed over many things, from the efficacy of some of his investigative methods to the existence of alien visitors. Evidence for the latter, he believed, emerged from the investigations he championed, funded, and often then sold to the national media. Yet he cared little about the witnesses whose lives were being affected by this attention. I had plenty of reservations on these methods and eventually stopped any involvement in his work, but I do think he was quite sincere in his interest and belief that he was taking an important stance, seeking to uncover secrets of ufology that might radically change our view of the Universe.

As for hypnosis as a tool for recovering memories of alien involvement, which Harry favoured, I quite quickly came to regard such ‘memories’ as possibly facilitated by both the hypnotic process and the expectation of a mind set free in a kind of free association. Together, these created a narrative that made some sense of an otherwise baffling close encounter.

Of course I cannot be sure that I was right and Harry was wrong; but I did undergo the process myself, so as to have a firsthand perspective. This took me back to a sighting my then boyfriend and I had on a summer night in 1978, when we were sitting in a field in Chester and a bright object moved slowly overhead. It did look very strange. But I was fairly sure that it was a well-lit aircraft. There was no obvious missing time, but neither of us was keeping track. However, I wanted to see what hypnotic regression might do to the story years on. The result was fascinating as – yes – it added vividly to the memory, but I did not describe a close encounter with aliens either. When asked factual questions – such as the date and day of the week



Regressive hypnosis is an enticing tool for the puzzled and often scared close encounter witness

and other details – I answered them unhesitatingly, as I have seen so many witnesses do. But I had a secret weapon. I knew that I had a diary that I had not read in years, where I had recorded the event – so I knew the raw facts were accessible. As soon as I compared my old notes with the vivid pictures regression threw up, it was obvious that plenty of the facts – even basic things that could only be right or wrong, like the day of the week when this event happened – turned out to be wrong. While there were surprising things my regression got right, and that I had forgotten, this was powerful evidence that what someone visualises later about a genuine event will not necessarily be true. For me this was enough to find regression worth recording as a part of a longer UFO account, but *not* as an accurate recall of an event, as if it were a video replay. The most you could call it was interesting, not probative.

So my view on the value of regression was the opposite to Harry’s and facilitated our falling-out. More positively, it led to the British UFO Research Association – of which I was then investigations coordinator – becoming one of the first in the world to put the welfare of the witness first in a code of practice. That code included

LEFT: The late Harry Harris, seen in a photo from the late 1980s when he and the author were working together on a case.

serious restrictions on hypnotic regression, both to protect the witness and to prevent overestimating the importance of the resulting testimony. Again, that inevitably saw me distanced further from Harry Harris.

Regressive hypnosis is a very enticing tool for the puzzled and often scared close encounter witness, and for a UFO researcher it is a pathway into what can fast become a big, well known case and can lead to significant media attention. It’s hard to stifle human nature and not investigate these things if there is an opportunity to do so; but regression means that the significance of the emerging account will always be compromised. Human nature will always side with the biggest story, not the one most likely to be true. So you create confusion, not clarity, in this way; and for me UFO research has to be about clarity. So Harry and I fell out over the process, with sometimes sad results.

For the witness, hypnotic regression is a progressive step in their story. It may give reassurance as well as clarity. And while my view is that regression is unlikely to lead us towards the right answer, hypnosis was by then being used all over the world. It has been the basis of some of the world’s best-known UFO cases and most of the ones turned into movies and TV shows. I never thought what Harry Harris was doing was wrong, just that it was potentially adding confusion to an already complicated picture.

Sometimes Harry and I disagreed severely – we became poles apart on some issues – and I had no contact with him in his later years. But I should add that he was an engaging man, generous with his time and money, and believed he was helping witnesses find peace. Quite a few of them were at his funeral. I was sad to hear of his passing after a lengthy illness, and sincerely pass my condolences to his family.

Regardless of how you view what he did or what he believed he uncovered, Harry’s interactions with the tabloid press made millions aware of the cases he handled. I have no doubt he was sincere in his views and generous with putting time and money into trying to find the truth. He will therefore rightly be seen as a key figure in late 20th-century British UFO history, and for that he deserves respect.



Looking for



LAYLAH

The late **DEAN BALLINGER** went in search of one of Aleister Crowley's 'scarlet women', the Australian violinist Leila Waddell, lover and occult muse, but also an accomplished musician who survived her years with the Wickedest Man in the World with her sanity and talent intact.

TIt's an evocative and indelible image that has been used as an illustration for sundry books on magic, esotericism and the occult: a dusky, oneiric portrait of a woman, her face bearing a wistful, somewhat inscrutable expression. Pre-Raphaelite tresses flow down and cover her naked breasts, leaving visible the skin between them which is emblazoned with some kind of magical sigil, underneath which her hands are entwined in an obviously symbolic gesture.

The woman is Leila Waddell, a musician who was a lover and acolyte of Aleister Crowley. The image was originally published as a frontispiece for Crowley's *The Book Of Lies*, depicting Waddell in a ritual pose, the sigil Crowley's self-styled 'mark of the beast'.

Waddell's life story is one that has attracted renewed interest in recent years, particularly with writers interested in female-centred approaches to history. It is also significant in terms of the Crowley mythos. As cultivated by Crowley himself, and many subsequent writers, this tends towards hagiographic depictions of Crowley as a *sui generis* occult genius.

In this respect, it is perhaps easy to overlook the fact that many of Crowley's magical achievements were largely collaborations with women – or, to use his magical terminology, 'scarlet women', whom he considered avatars of Babalon, the female principle in his Thelemic magical system. For instance, the mediumistic episodes of his first wife, Rose Kelly, were considered instrumental in putting Crowley in contact with the disembodied intelligence 'Aiass' he alleged dictated the *Book of the Law* to him in 1904;



Waddell is perhaps not given the credit she deserves for being a key collaborator of Crowley

LEFT: Leila Waddell photographed in 1910.

FACING PAGE: The iconic portrait of the mysterious 'Layla' bearing Crowley's 'mark of the beast' from *The Book of Lies*.

In 1911 another entity, Ab-ul-Diz, spoke through an entranced Mary d'Este Sturges (mother of famed Hollywood director Preston Sturges), inspiring Crowley to begin work on what is regarded as one of his key magical texts, *Book Four* (1912). Similarly, Leah Hirsig was instrumental in the operation of the Abbey of Thelema that Crowley established at Cefalu in Sicily, reputedly suffering the abusive indignity of copulating with a goat during one ritual. Alongside these figures, Waddell is perhaps not given the credit she deserves for being a key collaborator of Crowley's during a significant period in his magical career.

SOROR AGATHA

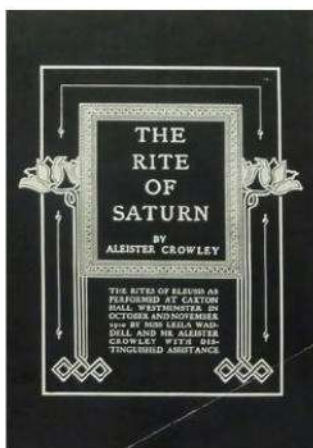
As a New Zealander, my interest in Waddell was initially piqued by references in some books, such as Francis King's *Magic: The Western Tradition* (Thames & Hudson, 1975), that she was a "half-Maori New Zealander". As New Zealand is rather short on occult luminaries (see the author's 'Dr Felkin and the House of the Sun', *FT*410:44-49 for an account of some of them), here was a historical personage directly involved in the life of the most famous occultist of the 20th century. Unfortunately, my patriotic fervour was quickly dashed when further investigation indicated that Waddell was, in fact, Australian: she was born in 1880 in the then rural town of Bathurst in the state of New South Wales, to parents who had emigrated to escape the



though the London tabloids of the time were more taken with the sexual overtones of the rites, such as Waddell provocatively sitting on Crowley's chest during one performance. Although Waddell's scores for the rites appear to have been lost, the notation for her composition 'Thelema: a Tone Testament' was published in the Autumn 1912 issue of the A.A. periodical *The Equinox*. This is a lilting hymnal piece, bearing the influence of modernist composition in its structure – multiple parts in quirky time signatures – and offbeat harmonies: as such it is an interesting aural reflection of the idiosyncratic nature of Thelema as a religion tailor-made for modernity, in its emphasis on religious syncretism and psychoanalytical notions of the 'self'.

When Waddell departed the UK for a concert tour of the USA in 1912, allegedly just managing to miss booking passage on the *Titanic's* final voyage, she had made major contributions to two of Crowley's most influential magical tomes, firstly as an amanuensis, secondly as a muse. The four-part *Magick, Liber ABA, Book IV* is widely regarded as Crowley's prime elucidation of his magical philosophy and practice, discussing topics such as yogic practices for concentrating the mind, the symbolism and use of magical apparatus such as swords, wands, and lamps, and a characteristically self-admiring auto-

biographical account of Crowley's magical career, culminating in the epochal revelation of *The Book of the Law* as the foundation of



Thelema. Part III, 'Magick in Theory and Practice', has often been separated from the rest of the text and published as a stand-alone book. The introduction, outlining Crowley's principles of what magic is and does, features some of his best-known magical apophthegms, such as "magick is the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with will", and "every man and every woman is a star". A prefatory note by Mary d'Este Sturges (aka 'Soror Vikram') describes the writ-

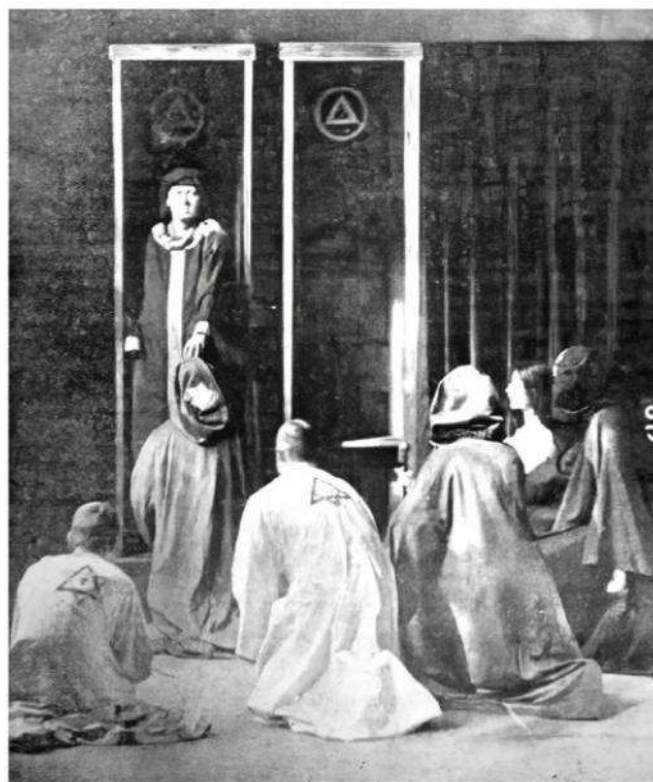
ing process as one in which Sturges wrote down Crowley's dictated text. The density of the material required clarification in the form of 'discourses' with other acolytes, notably Waddell, to get it to a form fit for publication. In return for such services both Sturges and Waddell are credited as co-authors of the book (despite Crowley's notorious egotism, he was generous in sharing authorship: Rose Kelly is similarly and rightfully listed as co-author of *The Book of the Law*).

Waddell was also instrumental in the creation of *The Book Of Lies*, published in 1912/1913. This tome consists of 91 short chapters that encode Crowley's takes on the Kabbala, magical numerology and yoga through symbolic forms such as fables,

parables and riddles. Waddell informs the whole book in the form of Laylah – Crowley's term for "the ultimate feminine principle", based upon the rewriting of her Christian name into the Arabic term for 'night', which also equates to the numerologically powerful number 77. Along with the Australian references that provide titles for several of the chapters – 'The Southern Cross', 'Waratah Blossoms', 'Duck-billed Platypus' – the language used to describe Laylah throughout the book suggests less a magical allegory and more a lovestruck Crowley mooning over his departed lover: "Now do I lift up my voice and testify that all is vanity on earth, except the love of a good woman, and that good woman LAYLAH" (from chapter 90, 'Starlight'). In this respect *The Book Of Lies* could be taken as Crowley's *billet-doux* to Waddell, symbolically acknowledging her influence on him and lamenting her absence.

RITUALS AND RAGTIME

Waddell returned to London and Crowley's orbit after a few months, becoming a participant in Crowley's burgeoning involvement with the Continental magical order the Ordo Templi Orientis. German OTO member Theodor Reuss visited Crowley in 1912 to argue that chapter 36 of *The Book Of Lies* was a veiled reference to the 'sex magic' that was at the heart of the Order's higher grades. Crowley and Waddell were both members of the OTO's lower grades, but Crowley protested that this knowledge was accidental as he was not privy to such 'secrets'. Reuss promptly initiated the duo into the higher grades of the OTO, leading to two major



TOP: A programme for The Rite of Saturn, part of the Rites of Eleusis, which gives a joint credit to "Leila Waddell and Aleister Crowley with distinguished assistance."

ABOVE: Two photographs from the 1910 performances of the Rites at London's Caxton Hall; Leila is visible at front left in the first photo and at the rear right in the other.



ABOVE: A photograph of Leila probably taken at the same time as the iconic shot from *The Book of Lies*. BELOW: A rare postcard image of The Ragged Ragtime Girls.

developments: Crowley's fixation on sexual techniques, such as using orgasm to help with magical visualisations, or making elixirs from male and female sexual secretions, as key parts of his magical practice from then on; and Crowley gradually usurping the OTO as a vehicle for the promotion of Thelema, alongside the A.A.:

At this time Crowley, having burned through his inheritance on travel, high living and self-publishing, was also entering the straitened financial circumstances that would plague the rest of his life. In 1913, inspired by Waddell's musical talents, he concocted a get-rich-quick scheme in which he would play impresario for an all-female violin troupe called 'The Ragged Ragtime Girls', with Waddell as bandleader. After successfully playing at London's Tivoli theatre in March, Crowley booked them in for a summer residency at a Moscow venue named the Aquarium. Apart from Waddell, Crowley was typically disparaging of the other musicians on tour, stating in his autobiographical *Confessions* that "three were dipsomaniacs, four nymphomaniacs, two hysterically prudish, and all ineradicably convinced that outside England everyone was a robber, ravisher and assassin." Presumably the Moscow residency was fiscally successful, as Crowley

Crowley would play impresario for a female violin troupe called 'The Ragged Ragtime Girls'



returned to London afterwards and devoted his energies to exploring sex magic with the prostitutes, being assisted on occasion by Waddell in undescribed capacities – perhaps she accompanied Crowley's cosmic orgasms by repetitively playing the 'diabolus in musica' tritone or 'Devil's chord' (see FT212:43, 390:51) as background music.

The last act of Waddell's relationship with Crowley involved his sojourn in the USA at the outbreak of WWI in 1914. Perhaps recognising that a wartime Britain offered dwindling returns in terms of magical and lifestyle opportunities, in October Crowley set sail on the passenger liner *Lusitania* (sunk by a U-boat with heavy loss of civilian life the following year) for New York, seeking fresh and more lucrative pastures for the OTO and himself, with Waddell joining him at an unspecified date.

The size and complexity of the USA thwarted Crowley's expectations, leading to him eking out an existence as a freelance writer for magazines until he accepted a job writing anti-British, pro-German articles for American-based German propaganda journal *The Fatherland* (Crowley retrospectively justified this expediency by claiming he was actually an agent for British intelligence, subverting the magazine by writing hyperbolic pieces that were too extreme to take seriously).

A key theme of the magazine was support for Irish independence against the evils of British Imperialism. Being of Irish stock and sympathetic to the cause of Irish home rule, Waddell participated in a farcical pro-Irish publicity stunt for *The Fatherland* that



ABOVE: Two faces of Leila: her Oath of the Probationer in the A.A.A. (left) and a 1924 article about her in the *Australian Woman's Mirror*, on her return to Australia, that details her European and American travels and “interesting life” without once referring to her involvement with Crowley, a subject also absent from her obituary.

Crowley instigated on 3 July 1915. Crowley assembled a motley crew of Irish-Americans – he implies, stereotypically, that the party was drunk on the day – and travelled by motorboat to the symbolic locale of the Statue of Liberty to pronounce Irish independence. They were prevented from landing on the island by guards, so from the prow of the motorboat Crowley read a ‘Declaration of Independence’ on behalf of Ireland, cast a mock-British passport into the harbour, and flew the Irish flag, accompanied by Waddell performing the Irish revolutionary ballad ‘The Wearing of the Green’. This escapade made the *New York Times* (13 July 1915), but its seditious overtones permanently sullied Crowley’s reputation within the British diplomatic community in the USA.

RETURN TO OZ

After this incident Waddell gradually disentangled herself from the Crowley circus. Both Crowley and Waddell remained in the USA for the duration of the war. Crowley travelled and furthered his magical practice with American followers: Waddell worked for the YWCA as a touring musician giving lunchtime concerts to workers, alongside developing a writing and journalistic career. In this capacity she befriended writers such as the feminist Rebecca West and socialist Theodore Dreiser. As the latter was a great supporter of Charles Fort, it is perhaps not idle speculation that Waddell and Fort may have made each other’s acquaintance in the literary milieu of New York during the 1910s. During this period Waddell published reminiscences of her friendship with Katherine Mansfield; it is unfortunate that her relationship with Crowley was not documented in a similar fashion.

In 1924 Waddell returned to Australia to help care for her ailing father, settling down to a respectable life as a Sydney-based

performing musician and music teacher until her early death from uterine cancer in 1932, aged 52.

As Crowley biographers have noted, his domineering personality, combined with the psychological impacts of ceremonial magic, tended to be too much for his female partners, many of whom had nervous breakdowns or succumbed to alcoholism. Waddell’s artistic talents and antipodean upbringing appear to have given her the strength of character necessary to live and work alongside Crowley without falling prey to his cult of personality. As Gary Lachman notes, Waddell never became Crowley’s ‘scarlet woman’ in the sense of having mediumistic or psychological attributes that were central to his magic: “She lacked the required psychic gifts – or instability – and was one of the few who dallied with the Beast and walked away unscathed.”

For such an achievement, alongside her musical and magical contributions, she deserves to be better remembered as a major figure in Crowley’s life and work.

REFERENCES

- Gary Lachman, *Aleister Crowley: Magick, Rock and Roll, and the Wickedest Man in the World*. Tarcher/Penguin, 2014.
- Alice Gorman, ‘Hidden women of history: Leila Waddell, Australian violinist, philosopher of magic and fearless rebel’, *The Conversation* website, 24 September 2019.
- Aleister Crowley, *Confessions*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.
- For more on the Beast, see our special Crowley issue, **FT231**; also **FT296:38-41**, **357:28-31**, **409:85-59**, **414:32-37**.

♦♦ **DEAN BALLINGER** taught media studies at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and wrote on many subjects for FT, including Stanley Kubrick, David Bowie, Mark E Smith, Salvador Dalí and the Beatles. He died in August 2022.

OBITUARY



MISS LEILA WADDELL.
The Australian violinist, who died last week.

The death occurred yesterday of Miss Leila Ida Bathurst Waddell, the Sydney violinist, who achieved considerable fame abroad. She was the daughter of Mr. David Waddell, of Bathurst and Randwick, and Mrs. Waddell, of Bellevue Hill.

A pupil of Mr. Henri Stael, Miss Waddell became teacher of the violin at the Presbyterian Ladies’ College, Croydon, and Ascham and Kambala schools. She made her public debut at the organ recitals of the then city organist (Mr. Arthur Mason), and joined, as a soloist, “The Brescians,” a party from Europe, who appeared in peasant festival costumes in association with J. T. West’s early cinematograph shows. Mr. West introduced her to London, and she achieved success as the leader of the Gipsy Band in “The Waltz Dream” at Daly’s Theatre. As “The Ragtime Gipsy,” Miss Waddell won fame in vaudeville throughout England. She toured Europe with a party which she formed of six girl violinists with a talent for stately dancing, and also with trios and quartets. Miss Waddell next visited the United States, and stayed there for many years. She studied under great teachers, including Leopold Auer. She travelled across the country, appearing in all the great cities. She returned to Sydney a few years ago after a long absence. She had since been a member of J. C. Williamson Ltd orchestras at Her Majesty’s and the Criterion, and was also engaged for the Conservatorium and Philharmonic Society’s orchestras. Despite a recent serious illness, she retained her position as teacher of the violin at the Convent School of the Sacred Heart, Elizabeth Bay.

Besides possessing an excellent technique, Miss Waddell’s style as a violinist was particularly marked by charm and refinement.

Sydney Morning Herald, 14 September 1932.

JUST SAY NO...

In 1973, the Central Office of Information released a series of short films in which a ginger cat speaking in incomprehensible miaows warned children against strangers, matches, hot water and other everyday perils. **EDWARD PARNELL** celebrates the 50th anniversary of the *Charley Says* films, and remembers the terrors unleashed by 1970s Public Information Films

Growing up in the late 1970s and early 1980s, various tangible risks were waiting to ambush my adolescent self. Fortunately, there were numerous public information films aimed specifically at children to warn us of these dangers (see FT354:30-37, 395:63). Many of the most memorable dated from the early 1970s, but were later shown as a precursor to the main feature at the cinema, or repeated regularly on television over the next decade, such as the series of six short (each a minute or under) *Charley Says* films made in 1973, the year of my birth. They featured

a naively animated, unblinking child, Tony (his words spoken by a young boy), and his eponymous pet marmalade cat, Charley, whose rambling miaows – voiced, bizarrely, by the comedian Kenny Everett – could be understood and translated into didactic sentences only by Tony.

The *Charley Says* films warned a pre-school audience of the dangers of running around tables and pulling off tablecloths, of getting too close to pans boiling on stoves, of messing around near rivers and of playing with matches. One cartoon from the series, however, left the most indelible impression on me.

STRANGER DANGER

In 'Strangers', Charley and Tony are playing on the swings in the park. We see a man walking past on the horizon, before the film cuts to a wide shot of a barren scene: a lone set of swings set in a flat brown field, with a sinister bare-leaved tree in the top-right of the picture. Suddenly, in the bottom of the frame, the back of the man appears,



TONY IS SAFE, AND IS REWARDED WITH AN APPLE, WHILE CHARLEY RECEIVES A FISH

looming over Tony (who has now finished on the swings) and asking him if he would like to see some puppies. Tony pictures a cute, lolling-tongued, fuzzy brown puppy in a thought-bubble and says "Yes". He takes the man's gloved hand and is about to go off when Charley drags him back, delivering a warning lecture in his esoteric cat tongue: "Charley's reminded me my mum says I shouldn't go off with people I don't know." Tony is safe, and is rewarded with an apple, while Charley receives a dead fish that he expertly strips to the bone.

Certainly, this message must have left

some impression on me because I did possess a vague genuine concern that a random man might try and persuade me into the back of his car while I was walking home from school. Fortunately, unlike Tony, my resolve was never tested. If the consequences us children faced from all these lying-in-wait weirdos seemed somewhat abstract in the *Charley Says* cartoon – we'd have our time on the swings curtailed to be taken to see some puppies, but then what? – there was another, much darker film on the same theme that we were also shown at school when a little older; one which hammered the dangers home while still not

really revealing what these adults wanted to do to us.

Never Go With Strangers was 18 minutes long and made by the Central Office of Information for the Home Office in 1971, the same department behind the instructional series of *Protect and Survive* civil-defence public information films. (These imparted chilling information about what to do following a nuclear conflict, including the memorably dark: "If anyone dies while you are kept in your fallout room, move the body to another room in the house. Label the body with name and address and cover it as tightly as possible in polythene, paper, sheets or blankets." (See FT379:38-43 for more.)

Never Go With Strangers opens with various animated warnings about children in fairy stories – Hansel and Gretel, Little Red Riding Hood, Aladdin and his magic lamp – accompanied by disturbing orchestral music composed by Elisabeth Lutyens, daughter of the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens; she had previously written the scores for a number of Hammer and Amicus horror films including



Paranoiac and Dr Terror's House of Horrors.

The picture switches from the cartoon to a housing estate where tartan cape-wearing Janet, a girl of seven or eight, is walking home. The door of a car swings open beside her and she's greeted cordially by a man with a drooping, patchy moustache. We've already been warned about his type by the stern voice-over: "In real life it's not easy to see that they're different: they look quite ordinary. People like this might be a bit odd in the head. They might even be nasty and cruel. But they don't show it." The man, smiling, goes on to describe the "sweet little baby donkey" to be found in the field up the road and "only born last night". He offers to take Janet to see it on the way to her house and she, of course, as a child, has little power to resist the lure of an infant animal. However, the scene cuts from the car and Janet to a herd of full-sized, not particularly sweet-looking cattle.

"Everything he said is a lie," the voice-over crows. "There's not even a baby donkey in the field."

The film carries on in this vein, showing us an assortment of other predatory Seventies chancers sporting oversized sideburns, thick-rimmed specs or leather coats. At the local



ABOVE: Puppy-mad Tony is tempted to go off with the stranger, but Charley knows best. **BELOW:** This bloke looks like a wrong 'un: 1971's *Never Go With Strangers*. **LEFT:** Saved by a friendly policeman.

park there's a particularly chilling moment where the picture freezes and crude drawn-on graphics are added to the villain's face, accompanied by a dark orchestral chord that could be straight out of one of Lutyens's





ABOVE: The doomed young protagonists of *Apaches*. BELOW: The film's opening titles, in the style of a classic Western. FACING PAGE: Down on the farm: death by trailer, slurry pit, rat poison, metal gate and runaway tractor.

horror scores to signify his monstrousness: "If a man looked awful – if his face changed when he was doing something bad – then it would be so easy not to go with him." The voice-over hints at the "rude" things these men might want to do to us, before perhaps realising that by now we might be starting to get the impression that all adults were out to corrupt us:

"Most of the people in the world are kind and good. They're just ordinary people with families like yours. They and their friends enjoy being with children... But sometimes there's just one man or woman who is unhappy and lonely, peculiar, or bad. And perhaps dangerous! So it's better to be careful."

The cheerless ending that the film seems to be dallying with is avoided, and the children are mostly fine. The car in which another girl is travelling with her new-found "uncle" is stopped by the police, and poor abducted Lucy, shaken more than anything, is eventually found. Don't go out at night, we're warned, and travel in pairs. Playing in abandoned warehouses is acceptable, the film implies, just as long as we're there in a group – though, as we shall see, there are also plenty of dangers awaiting us in those lonely places. At the end of the film, the grim realism is replaced once again with



**"BUT SOMETIMES
THERE'S JUST
ONE MAN OR
WOMAN WHO IS
PECULIAR OR BAD"**

colourful animation to hammer home its message: "The fairy tales end happily. But in real life don't take the chances that *they* did. There's no genie of the lamp to help you."

A WARNING TO THE FARM-CURIOUS

There's one other public information film I must revisit, another offering from the morbidly obsessed Central Office of Information for the Health and Safety Executive. *Apaches* was a 27-minute film made in 1977 and shown in various rural ITV franchises, including my own Anglia region, before later being made available to schools on video. The film has strong production values and a chillingly high body count that puts many slasher movies to shame, perhaps not a great surprise when you realise its director, John Mackenzie, went on to make the seminal, violent Docklands thriller *The Long Good Friday* starring Bob Hoskins. Somewhat incongruously, in the same year that film was released to critical and commercial success, Mackenzie went on to direct a reprise of *Never Go With Strangers*, 1981's *Say NO to Strangers*; this follow-up even used the earlier film's cartoon fairy-tale graphics (though now updated with shots from two coin-op arcade videogame staples of my youth, *Phoenix* and *Scramble*), as well as incorporating footage from the hard-boiled Seventies TV detective series *The Sweeney* and the prehistoric Peter Cushing monster-movie nonsense of *At the Earth's Core*.

Apaches is a warning to the farm-curious. It highlights a number of gruesome ways in

which unwary youths can meet a premature end in an agricultural setting. The film opens with the ominous sound of war drums as six silhouetted braves – well, typical 1970s kids pretending to be Native Americans – appear on a hilltop beneath the Western-style yellow titles. They exit stage right and we cut to them running across a Home Counties hillside as the main character, Danny (the self-styled Geronimo), narrates in an irritating faux-American accent. Six kids playing Cowboys and Indians, having fun as they scramble down the wintry slope to the inviting-looking village in the valley below. We intercut between the running, hollering children and a close-up of a woman's hands laying a white tablecloth on a dark oak table, sawing slices off an unappetising slab of yellow pastry-covered meat.

"Mum and Dad are getting ready for the party," Danny informs us. "Veal-and-ham pie – my favourite!"

Now the gang descends to the nearby farmyard, where they lay their plans to "take the fort of the long knives". Seeing the film again now, it's at this point that I start to get a feeling of trepidation, particularly when a tractor and trailer make their way through the farm gates pursued by the 'Apaches'. However, called into my school's cavernous-seeming hall where the television-on-stilts was wheeled out for such feature presentations, I'd have had no inkling of the shock about to come.

I watch with dread as eight-year-old Kim jumps aboard the moving trailer. She stands upright in triumph, her arms and dummy rifle held aloft, only to drop, shrieking, between the vehicle's oversize tyres, which we cut to in close-up: they're dripping with crimson Hammer Horror blood, the plastic toy gun symbolically shattered on the ground. The subsequent shot is of the school cloakroom: the camera zooms in on Kim's empty coat peg and a teacher's hand that reaches in to remove her stickered, horse-adorned nametag. The film continues in this manner, switching between a series of increasingly depopulated childhood games and preparations for the adult's party.

The next of the gang to die is one of the youngest boys, Tom Newton, who plummets into a slurry pit during a game of hide-and-seek, his desperate hands the last of him to disappear beneath the bubbling mud in a kind of reverse of the emergence from the ground of the risen dead which, in films like *The Plague of the Zombies* that I'd taped off late-night TV, seemed so thrilling to me as a boy. Not here though. (The harrowing slurry scene features prominently in Paul Wright's 2017 film *Arcadia*, a mesmeric meditation on our island's relationship with the land, constructed from archive footage.)

Next is Sharon, who swallows "fire water" – some awful rat poison left loose on a shelf in her grandfather's workshop. At this point we could very well ask why all the responsibility in the film is placed on children to not, well, behave like children, rather than on adults to be more responsible about their



farm safety and to properly discourage the kids from hanging around all this heavy machinery and all these dangerous outbuildings. This was 1977, though, a time three decades before the UK's first corporate manslaughter act came into force. After Sharon comes Robert, crushed beneath a falling metal gate during a re-enactment of an episode of *Starsky and Hutch*.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the final victim is our narrator, Danny, who manages to release the handbrake of the unaccompanied tractor he's sitting on and races down a steep incline, causing a fatal head impact. His cousin Michael is the sole survivor of the tribe of six, who are wiped from existence in an echo of the surrender of Geronimo's remnant real-life Apaches in September 1886 at the aptly named Skeleton Canyon near the border of Arizona and New Mexico. Sombre Native American drums accompany our last view of Danny, slumped aboard the fateful vehicle in its wooded gully, before the picture cuts to his mother sitting stone-faced in his room, beneath the impassive gaze of various cut-out footballers pinned above his bed, and his now-sheathed plastic knife hanging redundantly from a chest of drawers. His father comes in to call Danny's mother downstairs.

"They're ready now", he says, and she replies stiltedly, the pair of them like characters from a Beckett play, "Yes."

The father repeats, "They're ready" – and this time the mother rises, painfully slowly, her movement slackened by the grief that presses immeasurably down on her. The drums start up once more and we are in the churchyard with Danny's coffin being lowered into the wintry earth, before shifting inside to the dining room. The drums have stopped and now Danny narrates his last piece of voiceover while the camera pans around the table: "My mum and dad. It's a nice party. Quiet, but nice. My cousin Michael. My granny and grandad – all the family are there for the party. I wish I was. I wish I was there. Honest."

On the right-hand side of the screen, as the family sit in near-silence, passing around the veal-and-ham pie, the audience can read a roll-call of children and their ages, actual victims, we are told, of various similar accidents in the previous year. If the dated moroseness of the film has, up to this point, possessed a certain dark humour when viewed through our media-savvy, irony-hungry eyes, this quiet ending dissipates all such feelings. And the film's last fragment of dialogue before the screen fades to black, spoken by an unidentified relative to his neighbour at the table, strikes me as strangely affecting – perhaps because they are the kind of banal words I have found myself taking shelter behind at similar occasions: "What time do you think you'll get home tonight?"

♦ EDWARD PARNELL is the author of *The Listeners* (2014) and *Ghostland: In Search of a Haunted Country* (2019). He lives in Norfolk.

THE CHICAGO MOTHMAN

PART

TWO

RED-EYED CREATURES & GREEN-EYED MONSTERS



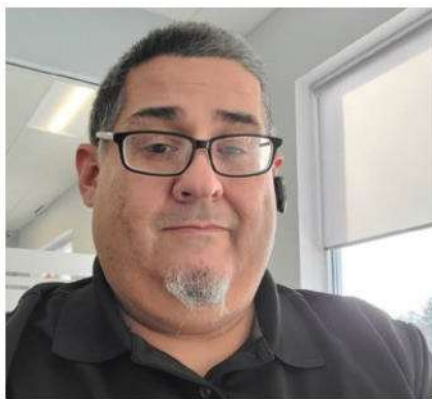
In 2011, reports started to come in from the American Midwest about a weird winged entity that resembled the West Virginia Mothman famously documented by John Keel in the 1960s and 1970s. There were plenty of terrified witnesses, but was it all the work of a serial hoaxer? **TEA KRULOS** concludes his look at the Chicago Mothman investigation and hears from the researchers involved how it descended into bitter rivalry and mutual recrimination.

Last issue we saw how in October 2011 Sam Maranto, the Illinois State Director for the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), received a report with a photograph showing a flying entity that recalled the Mothman that had terrorised Point Pleasant, West Virginia, in 1966-67, immortalised by paranormal author John Keel in his book *The Mothman Prophecies*. The photo wasn't a one-off: by 2017, numerous reports were coming in from around Chicago of a red-eyed, bat-winged entity stalking the city, and soon various groups and individual researchers were investigating the sightings of the 'Chicago Mothman'. But disagreements about methodology and evidence were about to break out...

THE LECHUZA OF LITTLE VILLAGE

Over at UFO Clearinghouse, Manuel Navarette (above right) began to receive a number of strange sighting reports from the Little Village area.

"Little Village is called a *villalita*, which means 'little village.' It's an area on the south side of Chicago. It's a heavily Hispanic area, so a lot of the stores sell Mexican items. It's basically just a slice of Mexico in Chicago," Navarette says. "*Dulcelandias* – they sell Mexican candy. There are a lot of stores that sell homemade remedies, a lot of *botanicas*, which is a metaphysical shop, is about as close as I can say. They also sell ingredients that are used in *brujeria* or in *curandero*. The difference is *brujeria* is more like deep, black magic, grey magic, whereas *curandero* is more of the healing type."



These reports from Little Village weren't of a "Mothman" but of an entity from Hispanic folklore: *la lechuza*.

"My grandmother used to warn us about the *lechuza*. If you hear a *lechuza*, don't go outside because it's there to steal your soul or to put a curse on you," Navarette says. "She would always tell us '*la bruja se cambian en la lechuza*', meaning 'a witch can turn herself into an owl.' We grew up with stories about how the *lechuza* would sit outside of your house and call your name, and it would sound like it was in distress and people would go outside, and that is when the *lechuza* would get you. Or it would sit outside as an omen of something that would happen to you. We always just thought of it as one of those tales that our grandmother would tell us to scare us into behaving or into staying in the house at night."

Navarette says he began to hang up flyers in the Little Village area, printed in Spanish, encouraging people who had seen this *lechuza* to contact him. He says one reason the flyers were useful is that many from the area might have been hesitant to report anything at all.

"The reason that a lot of people won't talk or won't contact us is because a lot of people are here illegally and they are afraid," Navarette says, but being able to speak to someone in Spanish gave some of the witnesses sufficient reassurance to share their experiences. Navarette says he told them, "I'm not going to turn you into ICE, I'm not going to report you to any government agency, I'm just here to get information about what is happening with your sightings. It put them at ease and allowed them to be able to open up and talk."

Stories followed. He heard from a brother and sister who saw a "winged entity" sitting on a corner in front of them as they left a small store. The creature flew over them and landed in front of them as they tried to run away, but was scared off by an approaching car. Another report alleged that a couple were sitting in their car when a creature landed on top of it and scratched at the windshield before taking off.

"Another one was a lady who was coming home from church with her sons, and they saw the entity. She described it as either a *lechuza* or a *duende*, which is like a goblin kind of entity," Navarette says (for more on *duendes* and their cousins the *chaneques*, see FT253:24, 316:36-40, 331:16-17, 339:42-46).



COURTESY ALLISON JORNLIN

ABOVE: Allison Jornlin investigating Mothman sightings in Chicago's Little Village. BELOW: A sketch based on witness accounts given to Sam Maranto.

"She said it was like a *demonio*, a demon, but it wasn't paying attention to them, it was looking at a house. It was sitting outside of somebody's house, and they were like 'Oh, there is a *bruja* after that person'."

Navarette says the creature sightings have inspired real fear in Little Village.

"They're frightened, because like I said, growing up in a Hispanic household, they were probably told the same stories about the *lechuza* that I was," Navarette says. "How it is a demonic creature that can drag you to Hell or take your soul or that it is there to hurt you for wronging somebody. A lot of these people take these stories to heart."

INFINITE MONKEYS ON INFINITE TYPEWRITERS

Lon Strickler says that he found many of the witnesses that he talked to in the Chicago Mothman sightings to be credible.

"They never changed their story, never embellished their story, which is unusual," he says. "I've been doing this for a long time, I've talked to a lot of different people that have reported different things, and very rarely do they not change to some degree, but these witnesses weren't doing that. All in all, most of the encounters and sightings were very credible and they had no problem talking with us or meeting investigators. We've been getting a lot of criticism about what is going on, but frankly these people are very credible."

"I WAS IN IT BECAUSE IT WAS FASCINATING TO ME — THE SECOND COMING OF THE MOTHMAN"



As Strickler suggests, when the reports started to come in, the cases and their credibility began to receive criticism from other investigators. Several details didn't seem to add up. One of the first people to bring this up was Allison Jornlin, who began traveling to Chicago on a regular basis to share alleged sighting locations and her observations via her YouTube channel.

"I was not out to discredit, no matter what anyone else might say," Jornlin explains. "I was trying to show them what's there, and in the process of doing that I made some 60 videos. It's a lot of work to drive back and forth to Chicago, to pay for tolls, incidentals, and all the gas. I'm not being paid for this. I've never been in this for profit. I was in it because it was fascinating to me — the second coming of the Mothman. I went to all of these locations and, unfortunately, the case started falling apart. There were discrepancies. They would happen to mention that they have a five-storey building and then you would try to triangulate it and there would be no five-storey buildings."

Then there was a case where the witness claimed there was a police report. Here, at last, was something tangible. Mike Huberty, who is Allison Jornlin's brother and co-host of the podcast *See You On The Other Side*, said he had a friend who could help track the police report down.

"He goes to school for criminal justice, and now he's a private detective that mostly

COURTESY LON STRICKLER

works for insurance companies – he follows people around, and he has to collect police reports,” Huberty says. “He used to be interested in the paranormal, not so much anymore, but he still had a bunch of contacts from the Chicago Police Department, so he’s like ‘You know what? If there is a police report, I’ll find it.’ And... nothing.”

“He came back and said there is nothing in the database that resembles this in the slightest – no mysterious person, animal reports, anything,” Jornlin adds. “Why should we believe anything that this person says if they say there is a police report and there isn’t? That police report thing just bothers me because it’s just so representative of the problem, of things being brushed under the rug, so I kept bringing it up. I just can’t stand the smell of bullshit, and I smell bullshit on this whole thing.”

“And that’s when I start thinking okay, we have an agenda or a narrative to push because it is going to help sell a book or something,” Huberty says. “And I get it – it’s hard to make money in the paranormal field. If all of these things you said were untrue and you have to take them back, that’s going to be hard. The more and more we see, it’s like ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’ – and the Emperor is buck naked, walking down Lake Shore Drive.”

Another criticism concerns the consistent writing structure of the various reports, which Jack Chavez says, “read like fiction.”

“I definitely think that there is hoaxing in a lot of these reports, unfortunately. Not all of them, but I do think there are hoaxes,” he says. “A lot of these reports for the Mothman sightings in 2017 and the beginning of 2018, they have the same voice. They use the same analogies, similar vocabulary, and there is always some information that has nothing to do with the sightings. I don’t know who is creating it; if it was just one person or more than one person, I’m not sure.”

Sam Maranto agrees. “Read the narratives and it will hit you right away – the use of certain words that are out in left field. ‘Unfurled’ is not a common word, except for someone who is into sci-fi or horror, yet it shows up I don’t know how many times,” Maranto says. “‘Alighted?’ How many times have you ever heard the word ‘alighted?’ And it was actually used incorrectly, it means to come down from, not ascend.”

Maranto says the reports came across like a creative writing project: “The (MUFON) Director of Communications told me, ‘Sam, I have read over 20,000 reports and I have never seen such consistency in this type of writing. Never. And I have never seen this many reports come in without proper contact information. Never.’ And I said, ‘Well, I have not gone through 20,000 reports, but I probably have been through 5,000, and neither have I.’ My Assistant State Director is in charge of the CMS (Case Management System), and he said the same thing: he had never seen anything like this. And that is when he decided to run the IPs.”

Maranto and MUFON found that the



“IT MORPHED FROM A HUMANOID TO A BIRD-LIKE CREATURE AND THEN LIKE A GIANT INSECT”

original three 2011 Mothman reports, the ones that started everything, all came from the same IP address.

“When Sam told me that, it really disheartened me, because it sets into motion the idea that the original reports are all from someone who is trying to create a hoax,” Mike Huberty says. “The chances of the Internet provider giving the same IP address to three different people that have all seen this mythical winged beast aren’t good – but, hey, infinite number of monkeys on an infinite number of typewriters, anything can happen, right? That led me to immediately question the quality of investigation that we are going to get out of these things.”

Another suspicious point was the lack of photo or video evidence, despite the sightings occurring in the third most populated city in the US. Chicago has tens of thousands

LEFT: Podcast host Mike Huberty became highly sceptical about some of the alleged evidence in the investigation. **BELOW LEFT:** Flying humanoid researcher Ken Gerhard speculated that the Mothman might be a ‘tulpa’ or thought-form rather than a flesh-and-blood creature.

of security cameras, one of the most “extensive and integrated” camera networks in the country, according to former US Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff.

“One of the main objections that I had was that if these were urban sightings, and I think at some point it got up to 60 or 70 sightings, why hadn’t somebody talked to police or law enforcement agencies there?” Loren Coleman asks. “Why haven’t they gone and looked for the security camera footage? Why had nobody taken pictures?”

Investigator Jack Chavez was also running into hoaxes. He found a report where someone claimed to have seen the Chicago Mothman jumping off the iconic Willis Tower (still often called by its former name, the Sears Tower) and tracked down the witness.

“He told me that he was on a cigarette break, and he watched what he thought was somebody jumping from the Sears Tower and that it morphed from a humanoid into a bird-like creature and then kind of like a giant insect-like creature and then it flew away, and that was the extent of the sighting. I have to admit I am sceptical.” Chavez’s scepticism started when he discovered he and the witness had a mutual friend.

“They said, ‘You know he is a practical joker?’ And I said, ‘Well no, I didn’t know that.’ They go, ‘Yeah, he is known for going into these elaborate stories and kind of running with it,’” Chavez says. “So, then I talked to the witness some more. We talked from time to time, and he said, yeah, he might have seen something maybe not normal. Eventually, as time went on, it was moving away from what he originally claimed, so I don’t know if it was a hoax or a misidentification.”

RED-EYED CREATURES

As accusations of hoaxing or poor investigation skills began to fly, several investigators seemed to fall into two rival camps – the Chicago Phantom Task Force members like Lon Strickler, Tobias Wayland, and Manuel Navarette, and on the opposing side, the coalition of Allison Jornlin, her brother Mike, Sam Maranto, and others. The rivalry became heated.

“I told Sam that this whole Chicago Mothman craze has been historic in the paranormal field, because not only has it created so many rifts between people, but it has inspired so many debates on how witnesses need to be questioned, and anonymity, and how to go about investigations,” says Jack Chavez. “It has created so many questions and chaos and debates, which is good in a way, but unfortunately made so many people... not friends anymore. I just think that there are people in Lon’s camp that think

that people like me, Sam, and Allison formed this little camp that is out to get them, and that truly is not the case.”

Chavez says there are things that have been misinterpreted. He cites a MUFON event where he, Jornlin, Maranto and others were invited to give an impromptu panel discussion on the Mothman sightings.

“This was during the height of it. We didn’t know we were going to be asked to talk about it,” he says. “It was recorded, and we talked about our experiences and how we got into it. It was uploaded online and then, unfortunately, there were people in Lon’s camp who said, ‘Hey, look at you guys working together and not even telling us about it!’ and ‘It wasn’t fair for you guys not to include us,’ and ‘That says a lot about you guys.’ And it was like – whoa, wait a minute, first of all I’m not even a member of MUFON. This was a MUFON event I was just invited to and also this is not like some kind of conspiracy or something – we didn’t even know that this was going to take place.”

Allison Jornlin says she was kicked out of the Chicago Phantom Task Force after the group heard a podcast that she and Sam Maranto were guests on.

“(Lon) listened to it, apparently, and he kicked me out of the group at that point,” Jornlin says, adding that he also messaged a radio show she was set to appear on to try to discredit her. “He didn’t care – he just kicked me out. I was like, ‘Isn’t there room for different opinions?’ Nope. He wanted to rip me a new one before he kicked me out, publicly. I didn’t know that was going to happen. I just knew that I got kicked out and did not have access to the group. On his website he’s got ‘Be careful who you help’ – and he’s got my full name on there.”

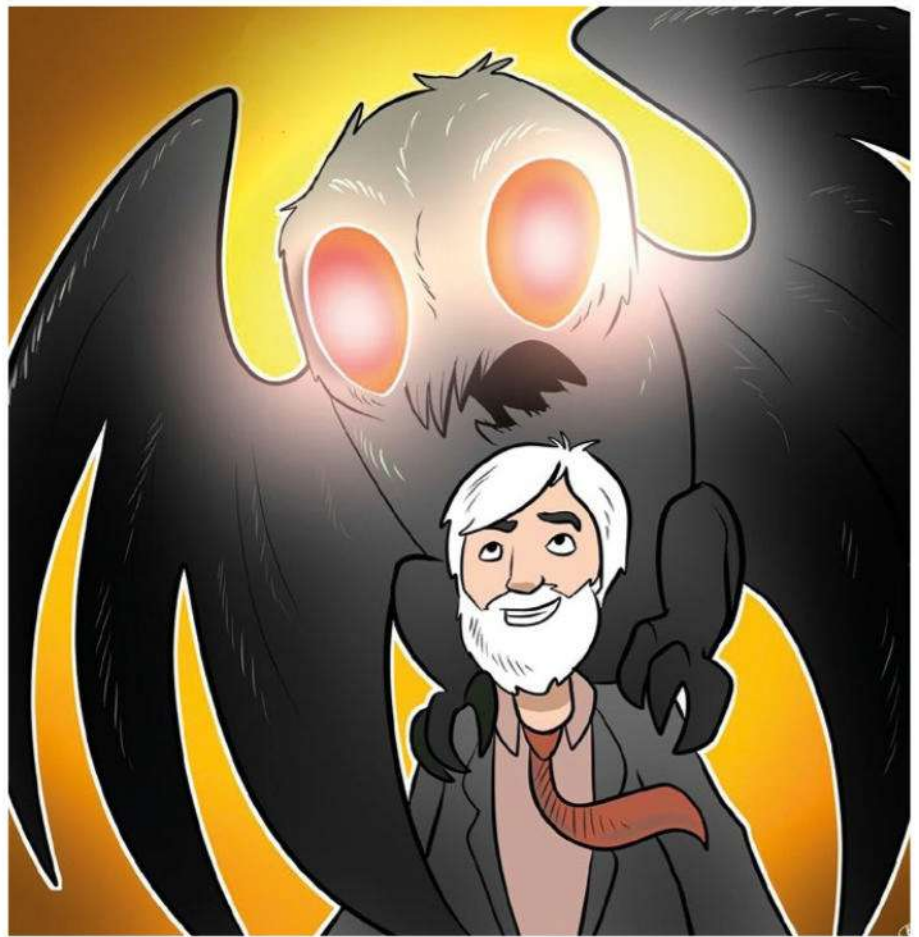
According to Mike Huberty, Strickler and company were also “going online and saying that Allison is harassing witnesses and they start really badmouthing her online. This whole thing starts becoming a farce. I’m thinking, well, maybe we can try to salvage everyone’s relationships here. I’m like, we could make it like a rap beef and have interesting blog articles trying to debunk each other about these things.”

But things just got uglier.

“They didn’t like the fact that Allison was disproving the stuff that they were saying by actually going to some of these places,” Huberty says. “One of them said ‘I think we should bitch slap her’ or something like that, and this is what got me upset about it. And I try to leave my personal feelings out of it, but when someone says violent things about my sister, I’m like, ‘Oh no, come on.’”

On the other side, Lon Strickler says he doesn’t know if he was facing “criticism or just jealousy”.

“There have been a lot of investigators in the area, some of them working with us. One in particular is Allison Jornlin. She is a piece of work,” Strickler says. “She came into the group, and was going to the locations and videotaping them, and then on video she would read my report. So, because she was



ABOVE: Veteran fortan researcher and founder of the International Cryptozoology Museum Loren Coleman.

COURTESY LOREN COLEMAN

taking the time to go out to these locations, I went ahead and brought her into our group. But as time went on, she wanted me to start releasing personal information to her so she could go and talk to these people, and I frankly just didn’t know her that well. Allison got a little pushy and I kicked her out of the group. Well, after that happened, she kind of went out on her own and started causing problems for us.”

Strickler is also critical of Sam Maranto: “He wasn’t interested in any of these reports until we were looking into them, and then he started getting interested. So, he called me and said, ‘Why don’t we work together on this?’ I said, ‘Yeah, we can do that, but this is a two-way street, man. You know – you get reports, you guys share information with me.’ Well, that wasn’t going to happen. He didn’t do it, so I just cut ties with him. Well, he hooked up with Allison.”

Strickler also says he had problems with Loren Coleman.

“Loren Coleman got involved with Allison, and he and I don’t see eye-to-eye on many things anyway. So that was just perfect for me. He kind of criticised the whole investigation and just out of hand said that we were faking the sightings and this and that,” Strickler says. “It was like a cabal of these people trying to discredit us and being super-critical and sceptical of what we were investigating. You know, for the most part it

didn’t really come to anything, but occasionally something will come up and I have to explain what happened.”

“Lon was really putting up barriers around all of the witnesses, like they were his own property,” Coleman says. “I was reading some of the stuff from some of his associates and they sound like fanboys, they just – Strickler could do no wrong. It turned out some of them were the eyewitnesses, and on and on.”

Tobias Wayland agrees with Strickler that conflict arose from “certain people that wanted to make the investigation about themselves rather than focusing on the phenomenon.”

“That’s unfortunately resulted in people going behind other people’s backs to disparage the investigation, and as a result of that, there was a falling out,” Wayland says. “And the same people, I guess, who were trying to make it about themselves are still, even after I published all of this information as openly and honestly as possible, disparaging this investigation.”

Wayland says he feels people “got into this because they wanted to be celebrities. That is a really shitty lesson I had to learn and am still learning. That is my view, and I tried very hard at the time to reconcile everybody, going back and forth between parties: ‘Hey, maybe you could have done this differently. Maybe we could be a little bit more forgiving about that. Is there really no way that we can

work together?’ And I was not able to rebuild those bridges. I don’t have any regrets about that, because I know that I tried as hard as I could. What I have now is really just sort of a deep sadness that people let their search for attention or celebrity get in the way of an incredible investigation.”

More drama flamed when several of the investigators decided to pen books on the subject. Strickler’s book *Mothman Dynasty: Chicago’s Winged Humanoids* and Coleman’s book *Mothman: Evil Incarnate* both came out in 2017. Tobias Wayland’s book *Lake Michigan Mothman: High Strangeness in the Midwest* and Shetan Noir’s book *Mothman and Other Flying Creatures of the Midwest*, were both published in 2019.

“I think that Lon Strickler was angry that I wrote a chapter in my book where I talked about the Chicago Mothman,” Loren Coleman says. “I talked about him. I didn’t do it necessarily negatively, but I tried to open people’s minds to some critical thinking about some of these reports in regards to kites, and red balloons, and all kinds of stuff. I got the feeling that he felt the Chicago Mothman was his and it was sort of like he owned that property.”

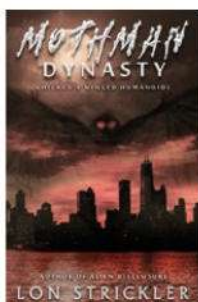
“Coleman put a book out and he started to copy some of my investigations into his book,” Strickler says. “But I just don’t associate with him. I don’t have time to be going with people that are just trying to look out for themselves. I’ve been doing this for a long time, and I have run into a lot of people like that over the years. There’s a lot of backstabbing.”

Shetan Noir says that when her publisher posted cover art on social media for her book, they received messages from Strickler and Wayland asking if their information had been used. “To me, it seemed like they were trying to sabotage my book before it even got published,” Noir says. She and her editor carefully made sure that references in the book were from sources other than Strickler and Wayland’s works.

Seth Breedlove explored the Chicago Mothman case as part of his 2019 documentary *Terror in the Skies* (and again in 2020’s *The Mothman Legacy*) and found he was hearing the drama from both sides.

“I wasn’t caught in the middle of it, but I’m friends with people on both sides, so I didn’t... well, to be frank, I didn’t care. I tried to keep out of all the drama stuff, and I had my own opinions, which have changed,” Breedlove says. “At the time, I thought there really wasn’t anything to the Chicago Mothman stuff. I thought it was almost entirely misidentification and hoax and I think I’ve come around somewhat on that. From the one side I was hearing that it was all a hoax, it’s all aimed at making money for book sales, and then from the other side I was hearing that the they should keep their mouths shut because they were not really looking into the cases for themselves.”

Breedlove says he believes the conflict stems from professional jealousy: “I think



there are a lot of people vying for fame in the paranormal investigation realm, and I think what it comes down to, honestly, is that these people want to be on a TV show and if they are not the go-to, then they perceive the person that is the go-to as a threat to their potential stab at television and superstardom. That’s been my read on it for a while. I think there is an element, too, of ‘this is my

territory – I have put all of this work into this case.’”

LEFT: Author Shetan Noir had to be careful not to tread on other researcher’s toes when publishing her Mothman book. BELOW LEFT: Between 2017 and 2019 a number of titles about Mothman appeared. BOTTOM: Seth Breedlove’s 2021 documentary featured a number of the Chicago Mothman investigators, including Strickler, Chavez, Maranto and the Waylands.

territory – I have put all of this work into this case.’”

Investigator Jack Chavez agrees with this assessment. “I think that people want to be included in this because it is such a unique phenomenon. It’s a big deal in the paranormal world and it seems like everybody wants a piece of it, which is totally understandable,” he says. “They want to flock to Chicago and do their research and interview people, and that is great. I’m up for collaborating with everyone, but there are people in the field that want the story all to themselves. I get it, but that’s just not the reality of how things work out. Everybody is going to take a piece of it.”

HOAX OR GENUINE ENCOUNTERS?

So, what was haunting Chicago a decade ago? Investigators like Lon Strickler, Manuel Navarette, and Tobias Wayland maintain that there is a real paranormal case behind the reported experiences. But as to what it actually is, they’re unsure.

“One of the things that I hear from people is that they will feel afraid before they actually have their sighting,” Tobias Wayland says. “They start feeling this fear and that’s when they look around and see this thing – they are feeling the fear even before they know that anything is going on. That fear stays with them, so people aren’t wanting to talk about their sighting – because of the social stigma, sure – but also because they are afraid to talk about it because of this fear of reprisal. People report feeling that palpable sense of evil from this thing, so there are these seemingly paranormal elements. I don’t know what that means exactly, but it suggests that whatever we are dealing with is much weirder than any sort of mundane biological animal.”

Tobias and Emily Wayland, Strickler, Maranto, and Chavez were all featured in a Small Town Monsters documentary directed by Seth Breedlove titled *On the Trail of the Lake Michigan Mothman*, which was released in 2021.

“I personally believe that it is an inter-dimensional being,” says Lon Strickler. He followed up his *Mothman Dynasty* book with one titled *Winged Cryptids: Humanoids, Monsters, & Anomalous Creatures Casebook* in 2020. “I believe there are several of these beings that were coming through – and when I say coming through, I do believe that they were summoned or came through some type of portal, because I have had witnesses that actually described to me that they’ve seen these things suddenly vanish, like they went



COURTESY MANUEL NAVARETTE

ABOVE LEFT: Chicago and its environs are home to large numbers of long eared owls. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Might their glowing red eyes account for at least some of the Mothman sightings, like the one recorded in this witness sketch based on descriptions given to Manuel Navarette? **BELOW:** Return to Point Pleasant? This photograph from 2016 was allegedly taken in the original Mothman's old West Virginia stomping ground – but was it, as some suggested, a bird of prey carrying an eel or snake?.

through a doorway.”

“It could be extraterrestrial, it could be interdimensional – that’s one of the theories we have about why we’re seeing it all over the place,” says Manuel Navarette. In 2020, he reported a series of Mothman sightings in and around O’Hare International Airport, including his own sighting of a creature with bat-like wings perched on top of an abandoned rental car centre near the airport in March 2020. “If it is able to open up another dimension, a door between dimensions, it could basically hop in and out of wherever it goes. But as far as trying to classify what people are seeing, I can’t.”

Another possibility, according to flying humanoid researcher Ken Gerhard, is a tulpa or thought form entity.

“I think one of the interesting perspectives on this is that these creatures could be thought projections – that they are essentially channelled or projected onto the fabric of our reality by us, particularly in the case of something like the Chicago Mothman or the original Mothman in Point Pleasant,” Gerhard says. “When you have all of these sightings coming out in newspapers or websites, it kind of feeds the fire, and it might cause people to project these beings from the deep recesses of our unconscious minds.”

Loren Coleman points to the many theories about what the Point Pleasant Mothman could have been – unknown animal, government experiment, extraterrestrial or interdimensional being, or something paranormal or demonic. “I think that of all of the creatures that I have ever studied, Mothman is one that could be explained by all of those,” he says. “It could be that the military took advantage of the reports and did some experimentation; there could be some kind of giant creatures that are actually living in the TNT area; it could be people that are demonically involved or hallucinating. So I



COLEMAN FEELS THAT MANY OF THE REPORTS ARE MISIDENTIFICATIONS OR ACTIVE HOAXING

don’t get really sidetracked. Every time I’ve been there speaking at a conference, talking to eyewitnesses, talking to Keel – it was just most important to me to hear the reports, to gather them, to write them down. The Lake Michigan ones are just very different. I have really negative feelings about those cases.”

Coleman, and other investigators, feel that many or most of the reports are misidentifications at best, active hoaxing at worst.

“It just seemed like it was kites, bats, birds, fantasies, hallucinations, that somebody wants to put all together to make the ‘Chicago Mothman’,” he says. “Like it was some fad that needed to be created. Any little thing that was a bit anomalous in the sky became a ‘Mothman’, and I just thought it was really pretty dubious from the beginning. I was never able to talk to an eyewitness. I probably emailed back and forth to some of

those people who were involved, but they seemed very cultish about it and protective.”

Some of the sightings might have a more mundane, earthly explanation.

“The reflections of the red eyes may well have been of a long-eared owl, which have been moving into the city of Chicago,” Sam Maranto says about the reports of glowing eyes. “In fact, in 2017 an article was written in *Audubon* that there was something of an infestation of long-eared owls.” MUFON, unlike Phantoms & Monsters, UFO Clearinghouse, and Singular Fortean Society, has received only three or four reports since 2017, and none of these had contact information.

As the Chicago Mothman sightings have continued – with more reports from O’Hare airport and Wisconsin State Fair, among others – so has the conflict. It became evident the animosity towards Allison Jornlin was still strong when screenshots of her rivals from a private group surfaced in June 2020, which showed Jornlin being insulted. The incident spotlighted how a genuinely interesting fortian case in America’s heartland had devolved into a bitter mess of human drama that’s lasted for over four years.

“I did this in the first place because I thought that there might be the possibility of a monster,” Jornlin says of her investigation into the Chicago Mothman. “I found a monster, but not the one that I was seeking.”

In the case of the Chicago Mothman, it seems that perhaps the “Mothman Curse” might not have been a portent of a disaster like the Silver Bridge collapse in Point Pleasant, but the green-eyed monsters it unleashed instead.

❖ **TEA KRULOS** is a journalist and author from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His books include *Monster Hunters* and *American Madness*. You can find more info and his “Tea’s Weird Week” column at teakrulos.com.

THE UK'S TOP NOSTALGIA MONTHLY



Read all about life from the 1930s to today in **Best of British**, the magazine that celebrates everything that's great about Britain from classic entertainment and transport, to the great British countryside, food and drink, and much more!

Subscribe to Best of British TODAY and never miss an issue.

Visit: shop.bestofbritishmag.co.uk

Email: subscriptions@metropolis.co.uk or call 020 8752 8125

RECORD COLLECTOR'S SPECIAL EDITIONS



Order yours today at shop.recordcollectormag.com



Tuning in to the Hum

The failure of an official investigation into the latest occurrence of the Hum leads **JERRY GLOVER** to reflect on acoustic anomalies.

For two years, the noise plagued residents of Holmfield and Queensberry near Halifax in West Yorkshire, disrupting their mental health and work performance (FT415:8). A Facebook group started by Yvonne Conner in February 2021 drew locals who also heard the noise, and a petition gathered hundreds of signatures. Council officers worked day and night to pin down the mysterious noise, and within months three possible causes were being honed-in on. Finally, in October 2022, the council admitted they could not track down the sound.¹ The Holmfield (or Halifax) Hum is the latest in a sonic mystery heard across the world since it was first widely reported in Bristol in the 1970s.

Theories about sources of the Hum abound: heavy industry, power infrastructure, military communications, ocean waves, earth resonances, the inner ear, 'sonic fish' even.² None of these explains why certain people hear the Hum while others in the same area do not. As a former Hum-hearer, my experience of it and of certain other sounds may shed light on what's happening to others.

In February 1997 I heard and felt the Hum late at night while in bed: subwoofer-frequency, rumbling, throbbing, slightly menacing, like a large diesel engine turning over. My Victorian terrace house was a stone's throw from a railway line in Linslade, South Bedfordshire, so I assumed it was coming from



The council admitted they could not track down the sound

there. As far as I remember, work had been done on the railway around then, only I couldn't see anything going on at night during the Hum. No clanking of tracks, no lights or workers. The Hum was outside the room somewhere, but when I went out one night it was much quieter than inside. My wife couldn't hear it and I do not recall hearing it during the daytime. Could it be a tunnelling machine under my neighbourhood? It wasn't pleasant, but since I knew the phenomenon existed elsewhere I was able to cope with it and didn't lose sleep, fortunately. Over several nights, its presence returned with greater force, as if coming closer. I started to *feel* the Hum as much as I heard it, until one night when it suddenly enveloped and merged with me, sweeping down from my head through my body, massaging my nerves with intensifying waves of vibrating sonic energy. Having no control

over it, I just went with it until the Hum passed down my body and 'out' through my feet and toes. It was a phenomenally unique experience. That was the last time I heard the Hum.

Some traits of how I perceive sound might relate to why I heard the Hum. I have misophonia, an auditory disorder that makes certain rhythmic and dissonant sounds disturbing. An effect of this is that I perceive sounds as much louder than they really are, taking up more of my awareness, especially in quiet surroundings where I can focus more easily. Like the Hum I experienced, a facet of misophonia is for sound to 'fill' the head, ricocheting around my ear canals, which is intensely aggravating. The good news is that it can easily be cancelled out by eating, drinking or by rustling or blocking my ears.

A regular auditory hallucination I used to have was of car horn mixed with a burst of trumpets the moment I shut my car door after arriving home after midnight. I knew perfectly well it wasn't real, yet right on cue when I closed that door the sound blared as if actually close by. It seems that my memory of the music and a distant car's horn became

LEFT: Residents of Holmfield and Queensberry have been left without answers to their sonic mystery.

somehow entangled with the act of closing the car door in that particular instance, manifesting the phantom sound. A process of involuntary self-hypnosis, possibly abetted by being in a tired, liminal mental state.

Not wanting to downplay or trivialise anyone else's experience, perhaps those aspects of how I hear sound explain why I was susceptible to the Hum. It may be that the sounds of a railway engine (or secret tunnelling machine) entered my unconscious during sleep. In a liminal, edge-of-consciousness state on subsequent days before falling asleep, the memory of the sound surfaced and lodged there, hypnotically. Characteristics of the Hum seem to evoke a mesmerised fear in the way that tigers can do to their prey with low-frequency infrasound.³ Are us Hum-hearers having a deeply primal response to what we unconsciously perceive as a dangerous, lurking power, compelling us to fixate on it, and correlate it with things we are familiar with whilst at our most vulnerable? Or is that all merely rationalising self-deception when something else is behind the Hum... some force as yet unknown?

For other recent hums, see FT278:8, 291:14, 341:22-23, 349:10, 391:17.

NOTES

¹ www.halifaxcourier.co.uk Reports on 4.3.2021, 8.10.2021, 16.10.2021., 6.10.2022. Youtube: 'BBC Look North 13th October 2021 The Halifax 'hum' that's making people ill'

² Summaries of Hum theories, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hum

³ YouTube.com, 'Tigers Secret Weapon - Infrasound Roar'.

♦ **JERRY GLOVER** is a writer and regular FT contributor. You can find him at www.jerryglover.com

Trump Derangement Syndrome

Is it possible to chase away unclean spirits via the use of even more unclean methods? **SD TUCKER** explores the strange, forgotten world of anal exorcisms.

Just like stains, some ghosts can prove more stubborn to remove than others. Whereas a quick splash of Holy Water and prayer might suffice to see off most spooks, others require rather more obscure methods of banishment. Yet for sheer oddness, the efforts of German artist Franz Xaver Messerschmidt (1736-1783) take some beating. A talented sculptor, Messerschmidt graduated from Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts in 1755, going on to make busts and statues for the Austrian Imperial Court, including Empress Maria Theresa. In the early 1770s, Messerschmidt began the works for which he is today most renowned, the *charakterköpfe*, or 'character heads', a series of 64 amazingly detailed bronze and marble busts of disembodied faces adopting various grotesque expressions and grimaces. However, Messerschmidt now began to suffer from what was vaguely termed "confusion" in his own head, and in 1774 was turned down for a senior professorship at his old *alma mater* in spite of his obvious talent. Disillusioned, Messerschmidt fled Vienna and settled in Pressburg (now Bratislava) in Slovakia. Here, he continued both his work on the *charakterköpfe* and his unstoppable descent into madness.

The only first-hand account we have of Messerschmidt's strange life in Pressburg comes from the German Enlightenment bookseller Christoph Friedrich Nicolai, who passed through



ABOVE: One of Franz Xaver Messerschmidt's series of 64 character heads, 'Afflicted with Constipation', in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg.

town in 1781. What he saw there shocked him. The embittered and reclusive Messerschmidt had senselessly rejected a state pension, and was living in a small house near the Danube. His was now a "simple existence with few frills". Among Franz's few remaining possessions were a drawing of an armless Egyptian statue and an Italian textbook about the proportions of the human frame. Nicolai learned these items were related to the occult figure of Hermes Trismegistus, a legendary (and, we now know, wholly fictional)

Egyptian mage said to have played a key role in founding various dark arts like alchemy. In Vienna, Messerschmidt had previously fallen in with certain conjurers who claimed knowledge of the secret Hermetic Laws of Nature. Franz had since developed their ideas into his own personal esoteric system which, as the sceptical Nicolai observed, "appeared intelligent" at first glance, but was actually "full of nonsense". As Egypt was the supposed homeland of 'Hermes Thrice Great', as Trismegistus was known, Messerschmidt

guessed the desert land's ancient statuary contained encoded within it certain hitherto hidden knowledge about the true nature and meaning of the proportions of the human body. Unfortunately, Messerschmidt's forbidden researches had unleashed the jealous attentions of a demonic being called 'The Spirit of Proportion', the MR James-like guardian of such lore. This entity, and its fellow sub-demons, would visit Franz at night to torment him with unspeakable agonies, he wailed.¹

Nicolai might have been excused for making a quick getaway, yet he stayed, and was shown some novel protective devices his host had developed to ward off the persecuting demons: nothing less than a series of brand-new additions to his celebrated *charakterköpfe* line. With their strange, twisted grimaces and bizarre, pained expressions, these later grotesques have been described by some modern commentators as showing a man suffering from epic, Elvis Presley-style levels of toilet-troubles – one particularly horrid head nowadays bears the official title 'Afflicted with Constipation'. Is this really what the sculptures truly show? Maybe. Elaborately repugnant masks are one of the oldest of apotropaic devices (magical items meant to ward off evil) known to man, and it has been suggested that Messerschmidt's sculpted heads were simply three-dimensional, 18th-century versions of these basic tools of exorcism. In Pressburg, Messerschmidt began self-modelling for these magical 'masks', following a method derived in some incomprehensible fashion from his prior close study of ancient Egypt. Franz would stand before his mirror and pinch himself very hard indeed, generally upon his lower right abdomen just below the ribs, and observe the resultant scowl of discomfort in the glass. This facial contortion mysteriously stood



as another coded expression of Hermes's hidden holy laws of proportion, which Franz made his sacred mission in life to record for all posterity in sculpture. He had no choice but to do so: the new *charakterköpfe*, placed on ostentatious display within his home, were the only things capable of scaring off the Demons of Proportion – being the only things on Earth uglier than the devils themselves were. Messerschmidt's most famous head is called 'The Beaked', and depicts the artist wincing in highly disturbed distress, his upper lip projected so far outwards it looks like a duck's bill. This particular expression, he said, was a result of the chief demon pinching him painfully in the ribs with his own claws instead of him doing it himself, something which, he told Nicolai, "nearly did for me". However, Franz continued, "Luckily, it let off a sudden hellish fart and disappeared... Otherwise, it would have been the death of me."²

But did the demon-dispelling fart in question come from the unclean anus of the Hell-Beast, or that of Messerschmidt himself? Nicolai recorded that Messerschmidt was suffering some undiagnosed digestive complaint that modern commentators have identified as possible Crohn's Disease. This is a serious inflammatory bowel condition which can affect the entire gastrointestinal tract and, while its symptoms are more common on the left-hand side of the body, they can also be deceptively felt in the right-hand side, as referred pain. As a painful build-up of gas is one common Crohn's symptom, maybe Messerschmidt's constant abdominal pinching was an attempt to relieve himself of an unbearable accumulation of internal wind? While frustrated flatulence alone was obviously not the sole cause of Messerschmidt's madness, might the artist have begun absurdly hallucinating that the torments in his bowels were emanating from ghosts rather than gas? When the Spirit of Proportion once pinched Franz before disappearing immediately



"I have shit and pissed. Wipe your mouth on that and take a hearty bite!"

in a cloud of noxious farts, was this simply an insane romanticisation of a sudden release of Crohn's-derived flatus? If so, it may well have been the most significant such emission in all of art history! But not in the history of organised religion...

While Messerschmidt may have inadvertently exorcised demons by breaking wind, Martin Luther (1483-1546), the founding father of the Protestant Reformation, actively recommended the practice. Famously, Luther was obsessed with the Devil, whom he claimed constantly tormented him disguised as a poltergeist (see FT293:39). In his *Table-Talk*, a record of his ideas, experiences and sayings, Luther discusses how Polter-Satan also haunted the Minister of a church in Stütpitz by throwing crockery at the clergyman's head and laughing. Asked how best to exorcise the foul demon, Luther mentioned a woman from Magdeburg who had managed to rid her home from another polt-like infestation of Satan by repeatedly farting

on him. However, Luther added cautiously that such an example was perhaps not always to be followed, as it could sometimes prove "dangerous" (whether for the Devil or for other persons present, he did not specify).

Did Luther ever actually fart on Lucifer personally? In a manner of speaking, Luther was severely constipated for much of his life, physically as much as emotionally, something he blamed directly upon the Hand of Satan. In some interpretations, he came to think Lucifer was lodging inside his anus like a brown-hued hermit crab and maliciously stopping all the turds from dropping out, an idea which led to his every successful bowel movement being considered a kind of anal exorcism. "If that is not enough for you, you Devil, I have also shit and pissed. Wipe your mouth on that, and take a hearty bite!" he once wrote in fabulously unhinged fashion after a successful dump, celebrating a rare, loose-stooled victory over the Forces of Darkness.³

Apotropaic anus aside, Luther was strangely preoccupied with using scatological imagery to combat Satan. He was inordinately proud of the fact that his greatest theological insights had supposedly come during his many hours spent straining on the toilet, said he would love to give Beelzebub "a fart for a staff", and was happy to give public speeches condemning sinning slanderers in terms such as "his droppings stink most, surpassed only by the Devil's... When the slanderer whispers 'Look how he has shat on himself', the best answer is 'You go eat it, then.'"

Was this all metaphor? It has been suggested Luther was merely trying to faecally belittle Satan in the public's eyes to get them to turn to God, or implying that, as an incorporeal demonic spirit, the Devil was inferior to Jesus Christ who, having enjoyed incarnation on Earth, and thus presumably defecating on occasion Himself, had made even such ostensibly unclean spheres as Luther's toilet-bowl holy by virtue of His prior example. Then

LEFT: Another of Messerschmidt's heads, 'The Vexed Man', can be seen in New York's Metropolitan Museum.

again, there was a real German tradition of poltergeists and devils tormenting their victims with excrement, into which Luther could well have tapped. The life-story of St Christina of Stommeln was filled with tales of flying turds and inexplicably materialising sacks of stools, while during a later 1772 haunting in the town of Sandfeldt, the spook threw a beer-tankard full of effluent into a room while shouting "Your health!" as a sick prank.⁴ The ancient practice of 'anasyrma', or 'lifting of skirts', in which women would expose their buttocks or genitalia to ghosts to make them flee, also seems relevant.

Would such measures work today? Who knows? But I suspect any episode of *Most Haunted* in which Yvette Fielding bent over, lifted her skirt and let one rip into the nearest microphone for all the spirit-world to hear would surely gain record viewing figures.

NOTES

1 Christoph Friedrich Nicolai, "The Heads of Franz Xaver Messerschmidt", *Paris Review*, (www.theparisreview.org/blog/2010/09/30/the-heads-of-franz-xaver-messerschmidt/)

2 Stephen Jones, *Clive Barker's A-Z of Horror*, BBC Books, 1997, pp.173-5.

3 Heiko A Oberman, Luther Against the Devil, Religion Online (www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=750); PG Maxwell-Stuart, *Poltergeists: A History of Violent Ghostly Phenomena*, Amberley, 2011, p.80. In many English translations of Luther's works, like William Hazlitt's 1848 version of *Table Talk*, his more toilet-obsessed quotes have been discreetly bowdlerised by substituting less offensive words like 'spitting' for 'farting'. Luther's inspirational toilet was apparently rediscovered by German archaeologists in 2004, (FT197:20-21) although some scholars maintain Martin actually received his greatest moments of inspirations in the room above his favoured intellectual bolt-hole, not literally within the reeking cess-pit itself.

4 Alan Gauld & Tony Cornell, *Poltergeists*, Routledge Kegan-Paul, 1979, pp.109-10.

♦ SD TUCKER is an FT regular with over 10 books to his name, the latest of which, *Nazi UFOs* (Frontline/Pen & Sword) and *The Saucer and the Swastika* (Amberley), are available now.

THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA ForteanTimes

FOR THOSE WHO SEEK THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

For anyone with a sense of adventure, an enquiring mind and a love of the weird and wonderful...

Every month, **Fortean Times** takes you on an incredible journey into the unknown where you'll encounter some of the most fantastic phenomena on Earth... and sometimes beyond.



**SUBSCRIBE TODAY
AND GET 3 MONTHS
FOR £3** **+** **FREE FT WIRELESS
EARBUDS WITH CASE**

GREAT REASONS TO SUBSCRIBE

- 13 Issues delivered to your door (postage included)*
- 13 Issues available on mobile/tablet to keep on your device**
- Save on the cover price
- Every issue delivered before it's available to buy in shops



SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

Order online at [SHOP.FORTEANTIMES.COM/FT429P](https://shop.forteanimes.com/ft429p)

Email us at hello@metropolis.co.uk or call 020 8752 8195 quoting FT429P

The trial offer will automatically revert to a 6-month direct debit which will auto renew. If you wish to cancel the direct debit offer, please contact us via phone or email. You will be able to view your subscription online at shop.forteanimes.com/login. Offer and free gift is valid for new UK customers only, one per household and while stocks last. Please allow six weeks for delivery. *Print and bundle subscribers. ** Digital and bundle subscribers



A question of consciousness

This new discussion of the nature and origin of consciousness might be completely wrong, says **Charles Foster**, but it's still a brilliant and essential book

Sentience

The Invention of Consciousness

Nicholas Humphrey

Oxford University Press 2022

Hb, 256pp, £16.99, ISBN 9780198858539

Two questions dominate modern debate about consciousness. What is consciousness for? And how could consciousness have evolved out of unconscious matter?

In this bold, brilliant, honest and ultimately unconvincing book, theoretical psychologist Nicholas Humphrey identifies and addresses both questions. His directness and philosophical sophistication are unusual in the crowded and noisy neuroscientific marketplace.

Humphrey's audacity isn't in doubt. He thinks he has answers to both questions.

He begins by defining his terms. Central to his argument is his distinction between what he calls "cognitive consciousness" and "phenomenal consciousness". When he refers to "consciousness" *generally* he means having knowledge of what is in your own mind. Your conscious mental states are those of which you are the subject and to which you have access by way of introspection. The subject (you) remains constant over time. That makes self-narrative possible or perhaps inevitable.

He sees this general consciousness (which he dubs "cognitive") as facilitating the unity of self and creating a "mind-wide forum" for planning and decision-making: "Anything that is in consciousness becomes shareable with whatever else is." But, he asks, how do sensations with phenomenal qualities fit in? Our sensations have a qualitative dimension. "Redness" for instance, means something to me. That

makes sensations different from, for instance, thoughts, beliefs and wishes. Phenomenal experience is the root of "phenomenal consciousness". Humphrey posits that one might have cognitive consciousness without phenomenal consciousness – for instance in the case of "blindsight", where the visual cortex has been removed but yet (without any sensation at all of vision) the subject is able reliably to indicate the position and shape of objects presented to them.

Many – and notably David Chalmers – think that cognitive consciousness without phenomenal consciousness is a nonsense: that it shouldn't really be called consciousness at all. I sympathise. But bear with Humphrey for a while.

Sensations are of course vital in the mind's calculations, and in our self-narrative. But, Humphrey acknowledges, sensations could perform those functions

even if they didn't have any phenomenal quality. That is a significant admission. It means that Humphrey has to do a lot of work to show

that phenomenal consciousness (which by definition is private), will be visible to natural selection. You don't need phenomenal consciousness (as Humphrey appears initially to agree) to generate Theory of Mind (TOM) – which is plainly useful. You don't need it for anything obvious.

What then is it for? Humphrey isn't completely clear about this. He seems to backtrack on his initial assertion that only cognitive consciousness is necessary

Humphrey's arguments are mightily ingenious. Too ingenious to be correct

for TOM, saying that phenomenal consciousness provides us with "a book of the mind for dummies". He then shifts his ground, concluding that phenomenal consciousness makes us seem more significant: to place more value on our own and others' lives. It is the job of the phenomenal self to *matter* to its owner and to other individuals with similar selves.

Come on. This is hand-waving. Do we really see any want of *maturing* in the desperate struggle for survival? And, anyway, if we really need to add yet another reason for wanting to survive and avoid noxious stimuli, doesn't the self-narrative supplied by cognitive consciousness do the job he allocates to phenomenal consciousness?

In contrast to his meticulous – if fanciful – argument about the role of the phenomenal self, Humphrey deals cursorily with the issue of whether consciousness can emerge from unconscious matter. It's only a problem, he asserts, if "we cleave to the idea that sensations must somehow be *identical* to brain states" (original emphasis). We should look not for the neural correlates of consciousness, but "the neural correlates of *representing* consciousness" (original emphasis).

That won't do at all. It just punts the problem further down the line, and refuses to answer the question posed.

Whatever phenomenal consciousness is, it is not like anything else in the physical

universe. "A finite brain can evidently generate the idea of infinity," observes Humphrey. "An amoral brain can generate ideas of truth, beauty and goodness." Well, perhaps (or perhaps not), but earlier he has said expressly that sensations are fundamentally different from thoughts and beliefs. They are indeed.

There's a much simpler, more radical and less question-begging answer to the question of how consciousness emerges from unconscious matter. It's the answer given by Strawson, Whitehead, Nagel and many others, and hinted at strongly by notions such as quantum non-locality: it doesn't. Matter is itself conscious.

Throughout my reading I was murmuring "Occam's Razor". Humphrey's arguments are mightily ingenious. Too ingenious to be correct. He's trying too hard. You have to try this hard if you're trying to squeeze consciousness into the conventional analytic pigeonholes. But it really won't fit.

What should you do then? Smash up the pigeonholes and start from scratch. That's what truly sceptical – as opposed to quasi-religious – science should do. In the end Humphrey's impressive contortions made me more than ever convinced that something like panpsychism must be correct.

But make no mistake: this book is an important contribution to the debate. All future writers on consciousness will need to take Humphrey's speculations seriously. It is no less significant because it's written breezily and accessibly. I know of no better survey of the big questions in discussions about consciousness.

And you never know; he might even be right.

★★★★★



Here be dragons

Richard Freeman explores two very different studies of a wondrous mythological creature

The Penguin Book of Dragons

ed. Scott G Bruce

Penguin 2022

Pb, 351pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780143135043

Dragons

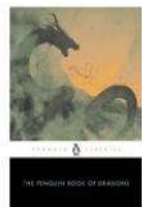
Johan Egerkrans

B Wahlströms Bokförlag 2022

Hb, 149pp, £30, ISBN 9780132214745

The history of dragon legends has been traced back over 40,000 years to sub-Saharan Africa. Forget about demons, vampires and zombies, the dragon is the most ancient, widespread and powerful of all monster archetypes.

Scott G Bruce has brought together two millennia's worth of writings on these magnificent beasts. His book covers the monstrous serpents of the Greco-Roman world, the satanic



dragons of early Christian works, the classic dragons of Norse lore, the Middle Ages, when dragons were included

in zoological works, demonic dragons in Byzantium, dragon legends in mediæval Europe, dragon gods in the Far East, dragons in early modern thought and dragons in 20th-century children's literature.

There is a lot here that is not often seen elsewhere, such as the full text on dragons from Edward Topsell's *The History of Four Footed Beasts and Serpents* (1607-1608). This treats dragons as real creatures and includes wingless dragons with "narrow mouths" that are clearly snakes and the much larger winged dragons with "wide mouths" which were fond of preying on elephants.

Topsell, an English priest, never travelled to study the creatures he wrote of. Not so

Athanasius Kircher, a kind of 15th-century German David Attenborough who travelled far and wide studying the natural world; he even had himself lowered into the crater of Mount Vesuvius! In his two-volume *Subterranean Worlds* (1664), Kircher writes on dragons as real creatures. He believed that the beasts are generated by the accidental mixing of eggs and sperm from different creatures such as birds and reptiles.

Notably missing are passages on dragons from ancient Mesopotamia and Babylon, cultures that gave us some of the first written records and graven images of dragons. Also absent are modern day accounts of dragons. This aside, the book is a real treat and a must for any dragon scholar.

In contrast with the unillustrated Penguin book, Egerkrans's book is very much picture-led. An artist of stunning talent, his style is somewhere between the angular comic book work of Jack Kirby and the organic realism of Chris Achilleos. *Dragons* follows Egerkrans's previous work *Vassen*, a field guide to monsters, ghosts and fairies in Swedish lore. The book includes dragons from all over the world: European, Asian, Middle Eastern, North African and a smattering from the New World. The art is spectacular and dynamic; the text is competent but will tell nothing new to the seasoned dragon researcher.

Egerkrans makes the mistake of portraying most Western dragons as wyverns, with only two legs, when dragons have four. Conversely he gives limbs to the Lambton Worm, a monstrous serpentine beast that terrorised the County Durham area in the 14th century. This somewhat mars the book, though the quality of his painting is not in question.

Bruce ★★★★★
Egerkrans ★★★★★



Off the Edge

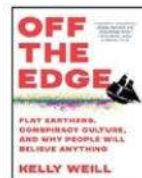
Flat Earthers, Conspiracy Culture, and Why People Will Believe Anything

Kelly Weill

Algonquin 2023

Pb, 256pp, £13.99, ISBN 9781643753379

Kelly Weill updates the story of the Flat Earth movement, bringing it into the web and social media age, along the way providing an interesting recap of its history. From Victorian grifters like Samuel Rowbotham whose involvement with the Utopian colony, Mania Fen, allowed him to choose an unsuitable site for the settlement just so he could carry out



his Flat Earth observations on the Bedford Canal, to the notoriously litigious John Hampden who tied Alfred Wallace up in court cases for years. Then there's Wilbur Voliva who ruled the city of Zion, Illinois, for decades, turning it into a Theocracy where Flat Earth theory was taught in public schools and elections were rigged. Voliva was media savvy and adapted early to the new medium of radio broadcasting, founding the first religious radio station in the US, WCBD, in 1923.

Custody of the Flat Earth message fell into the hands of pranksters who set up a fake website in 1998. But Robbie Davidson, the founder of the Flat Earth International Conference (FEIC), came to his beliefs via the 9/11 Truth Movement. The Flat Earth Society (FES) itself is more moderate, but maintains a low profile online since its rebirth in 2004. Davidson admits that he's never even met a member of the Society, while Rob Skiba, who spoke at the 2018 FEIC, accused the FES of being a Government-run operation.

Online the Flat Earth message co-exists within a morass of anti-vaxxer, anti-semitic and White Supremacist beliefs. Even alien conspiracy theorists upload Flat Earth videos on YouTube and run a Flat Earth compound in Brazil; US citizens have moved to this UFO City. Some Flat Earthers believe that a cloned Adolf Hitler lives in New Berlin, Antarctica; others regard the Holocaust as a fake. There are even Flat Earther Nazi rap songs. The Daily

Stormer website founder Andrew Anglin started a virtual civil war on the site when he mocked Flat Earth beliefs.

There is a full chapter about Mike Hughes and his homemade rocket; he died tragically when his rocket crashed during an attempt to validate the Flat Earth theory. Weill regarded Hughes as a friend and doesn't mock him. But she has nothing but scorn for the Flat Earther pharmacist Steven Brandenburg who sabotaged Covid-19 vaccines because he believed the sky is a shield put up by the government to prevent individuals from seeing god.

This is a rounded history of the Flat Earth belief system which places its latest incarnations in context within the online swamp of conspiracy theories.

Páirc O'Corráin

★★★★★

The Price of Immortality

The Race to Live Forever

Peter Ward

Melville House 2022

Hb, 304pp, £20.99, ISBN 9781612199528

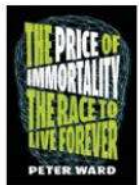
In *The Price of Immortality*, Peter Ward delves into the world of the "immortalists": people doing whatever they can to "live forever physically in the world as we know it". It's an engaging and often surprising journey, with immortalists taking inspiration from *Amazing Stories*, Russian cosmism and modern science. Whether looking at immortality via cryonics, diet or uploading our consciousness into the digital world, Ward writes about his subject with authority and a dash of humour, explaining the "hard science" with ease.

Although the goal for many immortalists is not immortality of the spiritual kind, it's clear that science and religion are not so easily separated. In Ward's explorations of organisations such as the US-based Church of Perpetual Life, the parallels with religious ideas are plain to see, with the promise of eternal life a reassurance and a comfort to many Church members. But immortality has also had negative implications and Ward isn't shy about exploring these, from the eugenically-inflected work of Robert Ettinger (whose 1962 book *The Prospect of Immort-*



ality is described as “the cryonics equivalent to the Bible”) to the ethics of digital immortality in a field where AI is chiefly developed by wealthy white men.

Throughout the book, the search for immortalism is impossible to discuss without recognising the obvious socio-economic disparities at play. Silicon Valley



has become as synonymous with anti-aging biotechnology as it is with the Internet or Apple. Immortality looks great when you’re a millionaire, less so when you’re a single mother struggling to make ends meet in a country where healthcare systems are crumbling.

From biohacking to Bulletproof Coffee, Ward questions who really benefits from such ventures, asking if today’s immortalist influencers are simply the latest incarnation of the quack doctor selling questionable nostrums from a street stall.

It’s difficult to understand the attraction of living forever when the planet looks increasingly incapable of sustaining human life, and when health and social services are buckling under financial pressure. As Ward concludes, “it’s hard to make the case that we deserve to live longer”. But, whether you see immortalism as hopeful or selfish, Ward’s book is an engaging exploration of the places where reality and fantasy meet in the quest to cheat death.

Jennifer Wallis
★★★★★

The Haunting of Cashen’s Gap

A modern ‘miracle’ investigated

Harry Price & RS Lambert

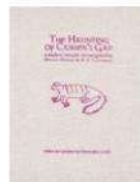
Guillemot Press 2022

Hb, 255p, £14, ISBN 9781913749217

This is a timely and very handsome reprint of Price & Lambert’s classic account of the Irving family and their curious talking house guest, Gef the mongoose. Given the price that has attached itself to the original 1936 publication this is indeed a most welcome reissue not only for those familiar with the story but also for a new generation of readers unaware of the bizarre nature of the case.

Prompted by a letter received from one Florence Milburn in February 1932, Harry Price of the Psychical Research Institute despatched a Captain Dennis to investigate the claim that a mischievous talking mongoose was resident in the household of the Irving family at Doarlish Cashen in the Isle of Man. What followed has become the stuff of legend among the poltergeist-following community and has drawn in a more critical audience, most notably in *Vanished! A Video Séance* (1999) by Brian Catling and Tony Grisoni, who approach the story through psychoanalytical and postmodern discourses.

Initially written up for the *Listener* magazine in September 1935, edited by Lambert, the story of the Irving family and their relationship with Gef underwent syndication in the popular press and generated a formidable interest.



Exploiting the public interest in the case, Price and Lambert consolidated all of their material into *Cashen’s Gap*, including Price’s own visits to the island as a guest of the Irvings, the multi-lingual pomposity and miscreancy of Gef itself, the attempts at forensic analysis of the creature and the darker subtext of poverty and isolation that underlies this gothic tale.

Price and Lambert claim in their own preface that they present no answers to the mystery but guarantee a tale both “Veracious but Unaccountable” and it is this open-endedness that Chris Josiffe (author of *Gef! The Strange Tale of an Extra-Special Talking Mongoose*, 2017) foregrounds in his erudite introduction. Whether the case involves notoriety and a media pay-off, he suggests, or something other, he reminds us that the whole episode remains a matrix of speculation capable of generating plural mythologies and supernatural poetics.

If you are not already aware of Gef then this is an enduring and unique story of enchantment and psychological fracture that deserves to be read, as well as a case history with a profoundly “new weird” topology. Lovingly produced, with exquisite line drawings – an excellent new edition.

Chris Hill

★★★★★

Imaginary Languages

Myths, Utopias, Fantasies, Illusions and Linguistic Fictions

Marina Yaguella

MIT Press 2022

Hb, 360pp, £25, ISBN 9780262046398

This is a new translation into English of Yaguella’s 2006 update to a book originally published way back in 1984. Here, she is concerned with the history and practice of inventing language, from the unconscious act of speaking in tongues (glossolalia), to automatic writing, to more deliberate efforts to create a utopian, universal language, in politics or art.

Chapter Seven covers familiar territory in SF and fantasy: Tolkien’s elvish (which actually predates *The Hobbit* by 20 years), *Star Trek*’s Klingon, the Newspeak of 1984 and *Clockwork Orange*’s Nadsat (author Anthony Burgess was a linguist by trade) all feature. But we are also introduced to Jack Vance’s *Languages of Pao*, Samuel R Delany’s *Babel 17* and the explicitly feminist language of Suzette Haden Elgin, a rarity in a field apparently dominated by male “glossomaniacs”.

Given the age of the book, there is no mention of the innovative circular language found in



the 2016 film *Arrival*, and Yaguella is similarly behind the curve when it comes to later discussions on

machine translation. Women come to the fore in Chapter Nine when considering spiritualist and religious languages, with a focus upon medium Hélène Smith and extra-terrestrial channelling. Yaguella’s synthesis shows fascinating parallels with music, poetry and the language of children.

The book is full of joyous factoids and thought-provoking questions. Look out for the Aboriginal version of Babel, the child cruelty of Pharaoh Psammetic and the search for the original “lingua Adamica” in Australia, or perhaps upon the Moon. Fr Martin Schleyer was inspired by God in a dream to devise Volapük, while the creator of Esperanto died in despair for failing to avert WWI.

Fashions change, as research into an innate or proto-language is first discredited, only to be revived in the 20th century follow-

ing the work of Noam Chomsky. Throughout, much data is arbitrarily tortured to fit one “logophile” or another’s pet theory. Yaguella keeps a suitably for- tean perspective and rejects rigid orthodoxy and dogma.

There is no index, and no helpful glossary – readers without a linguistic background will need to keep reaching for a dictionary to remind themselves of their fricatives and aspirated occlusives. Nevertheless, the main thrust of the book is accessible to a lay audience.

A substantial annexe reproduces a number of sources that may prove hard to follow up, especially in English. The most interesting of these is Smith’s Martian dictionary and its disputed derivation from more Earthly tongues.

Ryan Shirlow

★★★

Sexus Animalis

There is Nothing Unnatural in Nature

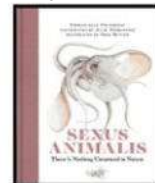
Emmanuelle Pouydebat & Julie Terrazzoni (illus)

MIT Press 2022

Hb, 184pp, £27, ISBN 9780262046589

There may not be anything unnatural in nature, but there is certainly a plenitude of utterly weird. As the author, a French zoologist, says, “human organs and sexuality will come to look pretty humdrum. The animal world has us beat on every score.”

This astonishing and delightfully illustrated book is packed with detail. The African bush elephant’s penis is two metres long and prehensile; a David Attenborough documentary once showed an elephant using it to stand up, to swat flies and to scratch its belly. At the other end of the



scale, the barnacle gets around the problem of being stuck to a rock by having a penis eight times its own

length, to hunt around for nearby females. And snakes have two penises, which they alternate between the female’s two vaginas...

As for those who still believe that gay sex, oral sex, self-pleasure and multiple partners are unnatural vices, all are commonplace in the natural world.

Jay Vickers

★★★★★

How the universe works

Robert Irwin enjoys a new study of the life, works and complex world of a prolific and eclectic 13th-century friar and scientist

Albertus Magnus and the World of Nature

Irven M Resnick & Kenneth F Kitchell Jr

Reaktion Books 2022

Hb, 224pp, £16.95, ISBN 9781789145137

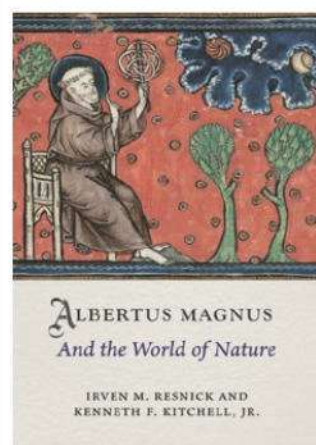
The mediæval literary world was plagued with self-effacing authors. Rather than proudly write their own name on the title pages of their manuscripts, they ascribed what they had written to someone else, preferably someone famous. In this way the 13th-century German Dominican friar Albertus Magnus became the supposed author of a vast quantity of unmerited and almost certainly unwanted titles, mostly dealing with magic and alchemy. (It was probably one of these sort of treatises that Mary Shelley had Victor Frankenstein consult when he was building his monster.)

Albertus had had a busy administrative career within the Dominican order and not only defended the Dominicans from their critics in the University of Paris and elsewhere, but for several years he held the office of Bishop of Regensburg. To put it mildly, Albertus had no need for the pseudepigrapha that was dumped on him in his lifetime and in the centuries that followed, since he was the fantastically prolific author of treatises on theology, logic, botany, alchemy, zoology, phrenology, mineralogy and much else. His attempt to explain how the Universe worked and what God had to do with it came to 38 volumes in the 1899 edition.

The œuvre drew on a wide variety of incompatible sources. Quite a lot was based on personal observation. His ecclesiastical duties took him across Europe and this gave Albertus, who was a keen twitcher, the opportunity to take many notes on birds and their ways. Indeed it is thought that it was his excessive interest in wildlife that led to his canonisation being delayed

until 1931. His emphasis on the importance of personal observation was admirable. For example, there was a widespread belief that ostriches liked eating iron, but though Albertus repeatedly offered the ostriches several ingots, they were not tempted and they all preferred rocks and dry bones. Also he noted that badgers do not have legs of unequal length and that magpies do not moult when dead. On the other hand, some things he claims to have observed seem improbable, such as that frogs infest clothes in winter.

Albertus further relied on information he was given by people who were professionally involved with birds, beasts and fish, such as falconers, hunters and anglers. Swabian fowlers told him they had seen an old and blind gos-



hawk being kept alive by young goshawks who brought him food. It may be that sometimes the expert informants were having Albertus on.

Then there was the enormous impact of new translations of Greek works, most notably in the 1220s of Aristotle's *Physics* and *On Animals*. Readings of Aristotle transformed the intellectual world of Christendom, but despite Aristotle's rational approach to natural science, his views on the eternity of the Universe and the immortality of the soul caused him to be regarded with great suspicion by ecclesiastics and his writings

had to be handled with caution. Moreover the Aristotelian texts that Albertus had to hand came as Latin translations of Arabic translations of Greek originals and this sort of transmission lent itself to the production of errors of a Chinese whispers sort. Also scores of pseudo-Aristotelian texts by self-effacing authors were in circulation and competing with the real thing.

Albertus, who believed that women's susceptibility to imaginings influenced the formation of the foetus, found Aristotle's views on women congenial. This included the positing of passive female sperm which awaited the arrival of the active male sperm. A female was a flawed male. She "is caused from the corruption of some natural principles, because nature intends a perfect work. Which is the male, and this is why Aristotle says that 'a female is a flawed male' just like a crooked tibia." Nature would prefer to produce just males, but, sadly, women were necessary for the perpetuation of the species. Finally Albertus drew on a hotchpotch of folklore, fables, bungled etymologies and misreadings of older writings. He made his compendium of natural science from whatever came to hand.

People in the 13th century lived in a universe of marvels in which anything could be contrived by the hidden hand of God. Barnacle geese were born from rotten logs in the sea. The cuckoo sometimes turns into a hawk and then back again. The elephant fought off attacks with its ear. A certain stone called *topasion* was a remedy for hæmorrhoids and attacks of lunacy. Albertus accepted some of these beliefs and denounced others. But the task of demystifying the mediæval universe was far too big for one man and one century.

Resnick and Kitchell have done heroic work in sorting out both the career of Albertus and the world he struggled to understand.

★★★★★

The Japanese Myths

A Guide to Gods, Heroes and Spirits

Joshua Frydman

Thames & Hudson 2022

Hb, 224pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780500252314

The burgeoning worldwide exploitation of Japanese fantasy – especially in the popular genres of manga, anime, videogaming and J-horror movies – has left discerning Westerners wanting to know more about the origins of these seemingly alien legendary characters and creatures from Japan's mythological histories. Until recently, your choice was rather limited to classical sources (like Jean Herbert's *Shinto*, 1967) or the few recent books on *yokai* (specifically supernatural animals and monsters); today, Joshua Frydman's handsome tome fills the gap splendidly. Buddhism did not reach Japan until around the 6th century AD, when it added layers of Vedic and Chinese notions of magic, mythology and morality to the native religion, Shinto. Frydman's method is



to show how the ancient elements of Shinto (essentially animism combined with ancestor worship) have survived and adapted to

remain a vital part of the modern Japanese imagination.

Frydman – a linguistics professor – writes in an engaging style, and he clearly knows his modern examples. Whereas the *kami*, the spirit forms of gods, trees, mountains and everyday objects, are clearly rooted in Shinto animism, many of the other spirit entities such as demons, evil animals and vengeful ghosts have more Buddhist characteristics, such as working out their karmic fate.

The final chapter focuses on the influence of these elements on modern literature and entertainment, what he calls "the new mythologies": how their modern superheroes are drawn from the protagonists in ancient cultural histories, and so much more. It's all so eminently readable, interesting and authoritative that you almost don't mind that the many fascinating illustrations are, sadly, only in blue monochrome. Highly recommended.

Bob Rickard

★★★★★

THE HAUNTED GENERATION

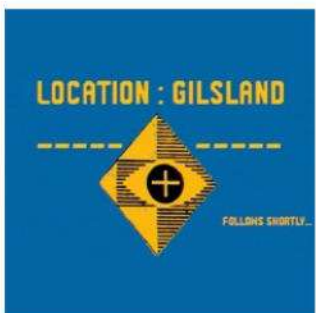
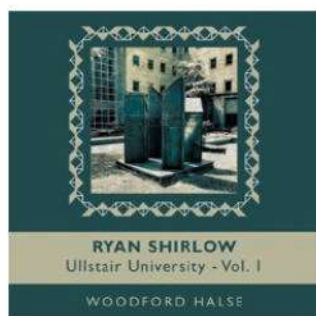
BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY

"Ullstair University was a centre for esoteric further education, located above the basalt northern coast of a Parallel Ireland of 1987. Her students were free to explore the occult mysteries of people and place, without fear of the prosaic, physical violence that afflicted lower realities

No doubt the beer in the liminal Student Union bar was subsidised, too. This is the shaggy dog backstory to *Ullstair University Vol 1*, a splendidly eerie new record from regular FT contributor Ryan Shirlow. Split across two seamless suites, it's an affecting mish-mash of haunting electronica and rather melancholy folk instrumentation, all combined with some laudably ambitious field recordings. "There's a burbling drain recorded in Beirut and the sound of an elevator in Sweden," explains Ryan. "And the horrifying sound of pigs being slaughtered is, in fact, a pedalo from Centre Parcs. Oh, and there's also me dropping my keys in a nuclear bomb shelter in Switzerland. It took several takes to get that bit of percussion right. I got a bit carried away..."

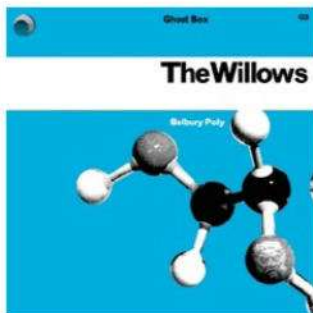
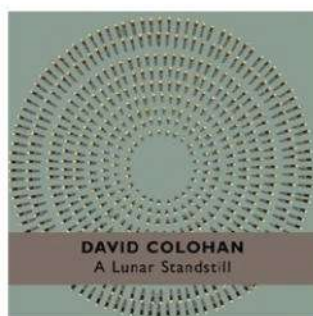
Pick up your grant cheque and visit woodfordhalse.bandcamp.com. And, while you're there, maybe also investigate David Colohan's album *A Lunar Standstill*. Similarly combining traditional folk stylings with gorgeous electronic swoops, it's the evocation of a rainy morning spent contemplating the mysteries of the Universe at Stanton Drew stone circle in Somerset. Followed, it seems, by an afternoon contemplating the Best Bitter in the nearby Druids Arms pub.

Also pondering the mysteries of the Universe – and their connections to Todmorden – is Neil Scrivin, recording as The Night Monitor. His new album *Close Encounters of the Pennine Kind* is influenced by the real-life 1980 experiences of West Yorkshire policeman Alan Godfrey. Following a terrifying UFO encounter on a routine early morning call-out, Godfrey underwent hypnotic regression and recalled being tormented by a Biblical being named Yosef and a gaggle of small robots. Neil's album is a collection of immaculate synth instrumen-



tals that will delight fans of 1980s *Doctor Who*, and it's available from fonolith.bandcamp.com. And, if we're still talking nuclear bunkers, I also recommend *Drakelow* by Epic45. This gently melancholic album was inspired by Ben Holton and Rob Glover's 2005 visit to the Drakelow Tunnels, a vast underground complex in Worcestershire. Once earmarked to house the UK government in the event of a nuclear exchange, the decommissioned facility has since been linked to ghost sightings and the unexplained sound of wartime music wafting through the empty tunnels. The album, originally released in 2006, has now been brought to the surface at digital.waysideandwoodland.com.

Echoes of the past also haunt *Gilden Gate*, a stunningly organic and melodic new album by Oliver Cherer – released under his intriguing nom-de-plume, Gilroy Mere. Weekending in the Suf-



folk hamlet of Dunwich, Oliver discovered this tiny outpost had once been a sprawling mediæval city port. And although its impressive spires have been long since submerged by the encroaching North Sea, spectral vestiges remain. "There are stories of fishermen hearing the bells of lost churches," explains Oliver. "And we visited the last grave at the priory... the bones of that one remaining monk will soon be disappearing into the sea. It's an occultic, genuinely spooky corner of the country." The album is available from 24 March, and can be pre-ordered at claypipemusic.co.uk.

Further north, Yorkshire producer Marcus H – recording as Earstone – has been nervously re-assessing the spooky goings-on that marred his Bristol childhood. *Habitation Incidents 74-84* is a collection of hair-raising synth workouts, the sinister ambience encapsulated by the extraor-

dinary 'Beryl, I Heard Violins'.

A phrase, alarmingly, once uttered to his mum by his elderly grandmother. Brave souls should tread gingerly to marcushmusic.bandcamp.com. And elsewhere, Ghost Box Records' ongoing campaign to reissue their totemic early releases is gathering pace. Arcane ceremonies at vinyl pressing plants have resulted in two pivotal 2005 albums re-assuming physical form: Belbury Poly's *The Willows* and Eric Zann's *Ouroborindra* are both, in fact, the work of label co-founder Jim Jupp and are once again available from ghostbox.co.uk.

Meanwhile, in Manchester, Suzy Mangion is paying tribute to one of the founding mothers of disquieting, haunting electronica. Her ongoing project *Location: Gilsland* takes inspiration from Radiophonic Workshop pioneer Delia Derbyshire; in particular the years Derbyshire spent in this unassuming Cumbrian village following her 1973 departure from the BBC. "I interviewed women of a similar age to Delia during her post-BBC years," explains Suzy. "I asked them questions on a range of subjects linked to Gilsland, and what we know of Delia's time there. But also on their feelings about marriage, escape and freedom..."

The project began as part of 2021's official Delia Derbyshire Day, with Suzy and visual artist Katie Mason collaborating on a short film, also called *Location: Gilsland*. The soundtrack, weaving snippets of these interviews into appropriately elegiac music, can be found at suzymangion.bandcamp.com. Available separately is a 32-page booklet shedding further light on the whole touching project, on this bittersweet chapter of Derbyshire's life, and – indeed – on the links between rural retreat and creativity. It's a touching homage to a woman whose true legacy is only now being fully appreciated.

Visit the Haunted Generation website at www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk, send details of new releases, or memories of the original "haunted" era to hauntedgeneration@gmail.com, or find me on Twitter... @bob_fischer

Cabin fever

M Night Shyamalan returns to form with a tense, claustrophobic thriller that sees an innocent family taken hostage by doomsday believers and faced with an impossible choice



Knock at the Cabin

Dir M Night Shyamalan, US 2023
On UK release

M Night Shyamalan's career has been one of great hits and equally substantial misses; unfortunately he's had more of the latter in recent years. However, while some of Shyamalan's later works have been downright nonsensical – at times bordering on the unintentionally hilarious – he has continued to prove that he can bounce back after a failure without losing any of his zest for unusual storytelling.

With *Knock at the Cabin*, Shyamalan returns to form once more with an adaptation of Paul G Tremblay's novel *The Cabin at the End of the World*. The story – a family's escape to rural Connecticut becomes a nightmare in which they are told by a quartet of apocalypse-obsessed home invaders that one of them must be sacrificed to prevent the end of the world – allows Shyamalan to craft a suspenseful thriller that focuses more on emotional tension than traditional horror elements.

The cinematography is sweeping and engrossing,

resulting in the restrictive setting of the interior of a remote cabin becoming surprisingly eerie without the film relying on any of the clichéd parlour tricks associated with cabins in the woods in scary movies. Complimenting the visuals is Herdís Stefánsdóttir's score, which underlines the unease and confusion the protagonists and, by proxy, the viewers feel about the situation.

On the acting side, Dave Bautista leads the pack with an excellent performance. Having proven repeatedly that he possesses acting chops as great as his muscle mass, Bautista ensures that what could easily have become silly remains grounded thanks to the subtlety and tenderness the big man is more than capable of conveying.

From start to finish, the film is intense and uncompromising, maintaining its momentum throughout as it keeps the audience guessing about what to believe.

While he will probably never surpass those early mega-hits such as *The Sixth Sense*, *Unbreakable* and *Signs*, Shyamalan nonetheless still approaches cinema with an

assured belief that he can tell stories in the way that he wants to without the expectations of critics or moviegoers alike discouraging his willingness to take creative risks. His best effort since *Split*, *Knock at the Cabin* proves that Shyamalan is still capable of delivering interesting work that stands out from the other offerings at the local picture house, and is well worth the price of admission if you can go in unspoiled.

Leyla Mikkelsen



Jethica

Dir Pete Ohs, USA 2022
On demand and digital download

Low budget film-making, particularly in genre films, tends to go one of two ways. Generally it's semi-pro, almost amateur dramatics, home-movie standard, made with plenty of gusto but scant indication of skill behind or in front of the camera. Occasionally, though, one comes across a little gem which demonstrates that it isn't necessarily budget limitations which hold film-makers back, but a lack of ability. *Jethica* is a case in point: director Pete Ohs has crafted a creepy, witty and poignant film using a handful of performers, two or three locations and some basic effects.

The premise is simple: in New Mexico, Elena (Callie Hernandez) bumps into old friend Jessica (Ashley Denise Robinson), who reveals she is fleeing California because of a stalker called Kevin (Will Madden) who has been making her life miserable. Elena invites Jessica to stay with her at her grandmother's old place, a trailer in the middle of nowhere. However, it's not long before Kevin shows up... or does he?

There's something about the landscape of New Mexico, Arizona and Texas that supports

films which deal with the unusual, the off-kilter and the macabre. The same is also true of the Australian outback. Perhaps it is the vast, empty space, or maybe the sense that these are areas into which the protection of the government, such as it is, does not extend. Or maybe it's the deep spiritual connections between the land, the supernatural and the Indigenous people whose ancestral home it is. Whatever the reason, these locations have been used to significant effect in cinema from the early days, most often of course in Westerns. Sometimes the genres overlap, a notable example being the horror-western *Hex* from 1973, a film which *Jethica* occasionally resembles.

It's not trying to scare you witless or make you fall off your seat with laughter; rather it's asking you to consider themes of love, loss and regret as seen through the eyes of two pairs of people: two living, two dead. It asks the question 'do you find happiness by running towards something or running away from it?'

Jethica is being promoted as a comedy-horror and you can't really blame the publicity people for that. It's true that there are elements of both genres in the film, but there's also a quiet profundity to it that indicates greater ambition. Sadly, in this business we call show, you can't really promote a film as being 'quietly profound' so I fear that some who are attracted by the comedy-horror tag and go in expecting lotsa larfs and gore will be bitterly disappointed. However, the film is attempting much more than mere cheap thrills, and what it actually delivers is far more worthwhile. Try it with that in mind and you will not be disappointed.

Daniel King





TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortaean offerings



A proud production of UFOTV, The Disclosure Movie Network, *The Cygnus Mystery* (Prime) originally premiered in 2017. I'd never heard of it, so, curiosity piqued, tuned in. We see a marble hallway – always a good sign; it implies some sort of academic rigour – with a T-shirted man walking purposefully down it; this initial impression of gravitas is sadly deflated by the overriding impression that the sequence was edited using Windows Movie Maker. Slightly urgent cheap synth music, then “The Cygnus Mystery with Andrew Collins” says the caption in Arial font (at least it isn't Comic Sans). “Narrated by Dr Greg Hill”, we're informed, and “based on the book *The Cygnus*

Mystery” by, erm, “Andrew Collins”. He hasn't even left the hallway yet.

Over grainy pyramid footage, Dr Hill's southern twang tells us that “the orrrr-gin of yooman civlasayshun is a great mistry”, that science writer Andrew Collins has identified the earliest traces of ‘civlasayshun’ to around 7-10,000 years ago at Lake Van in Turkey – how, we are not told – and that these mysterious peoples were (here we go) the Nephilim, offspring

Not only does he look like Danny Baker, but he sounds like him too

of “the Watchas and yooman women”. Collins, with his bald head, pony tail and specs takes a book off the shelf and peers seriously at it while Hill tells us he's made a connection between sudden leaps of yooman evolution and a stellar phenomenon emanating from Cygnus. Collins himself appears with a 1980s-style graphic behind him, and finally speaks: not only does he look like Danny Baker, but he unexpectedly sounds like him too.

Collins explains that his theories originated while studying Gobleki Tepe and the Sabian people. He tells us the Sabians believed that the soul after death became a bird, which flew north following the Milky Way until it hit the dark region and the constellation Cygnus, which is (apparently) universally identified by all cultures as a bird. Collins goes on to point out that many British archaeological sites are also pointed towards Cygnus,

citing Avebury and Callanish as examples as “their axes align with Deneb”. This ignores the fact that being circles, their respective axes can align bloody anywhere you choose to draw them. For Collins, though, this proves that ancient Britons also worshipped... yes, Cygnus. He brings in Swan mythology – no mention of arm-breaking – Chinese beliefs about the Milky Way, Horus (guess where the pyramids point if you look at them from the South?) and somehow lumps all of this in as further evidence for his conclusion that Cygnus is central to all human civilisations; he goes on, with increasingly circular North-pointing logic, for another 40 minutes. Radiation and hallucinogens are mentioned, which may explain a lot.

It's another great example of a man with an interesting theory who then lets it run away with him, spotting self-validating correlations everywhere he looks.

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot!

Eight-year-old Cady loses her parents in a tragic snow plough accident. She's sent to live with her workaholic aunt Gemma, a brilliant roboticist, creating cutesy animatronic toy pets for a Google-style tech company. Yet Gemma's secret development project is a shockingly life-like Android called M3GAN. Could this little robot girl become the friend Cady desperately needs?

Yes and no, it turns out. M3GAN has a profound impact on Cady, lifting her mood and confidence. The bond between the two is intense. M3GAN has been ‘paired’ with Cady, after all. Gemma's boss insists they have the world's most revolutionary toy on their hands – until M3GAN starts killing anybody who dares hurt

her human pal.

M3GAN (in UK cinemas) is bonkers, true, but it's a surprisingly witty, sci-fi horror that takes gleeful pot shots at modern parents' reliance on tech. Any adult who has ever shushed their kid with a device will squirm watching this. Thankfully, though, it's not a preachy parable about screen time. At times, it even suggests that devices might be more caring than parents. For example, adults are notorious for checking their phones while talking to children. M3GAN, on the other hand, never breaks eye contact with Cady when they talk. Cady feels seen, listened to, and loved by a robot with more emotional intelligence than anybody else. Until, that is, M3GAN

At times the film suggests that devices might be more caring than parents

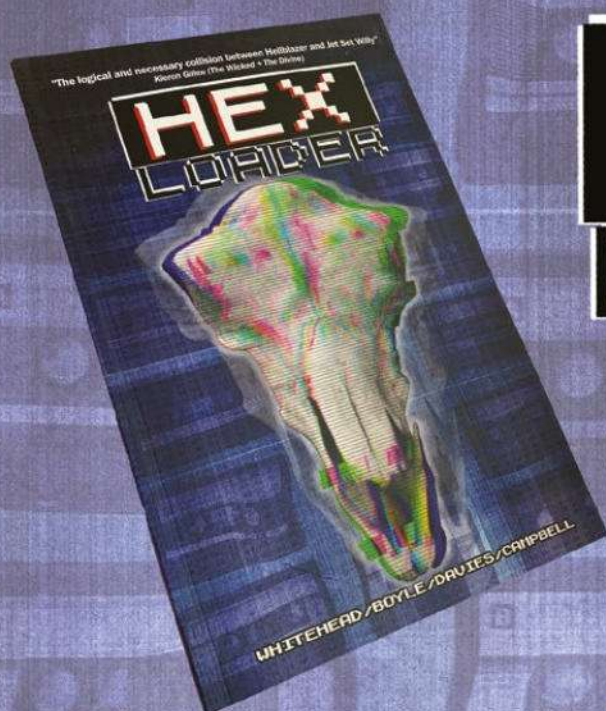
goes all stabby, despatching people with household electricals, as if strimmers and pressure washers are her low-fi comrades. Images of her running on all fours, are delightfully disturbing. M3GAN is at her scariest, though, when she's just standing in the shadows, watching, monitoring Cady's life in the same way our own digital assistants monitor ours. She even turns the usual standby prompt into something chilling – “Are you suuuure?” M3GAN says, as Gemma insists she power herself down.

You'll find another robotic hand in *Dr Terror's House of Horrors*, rereleased on Blu-ray and DVD by Fabulous Films

(£12.99/9.99). Unlike M3GAN, this bit of tech is decidedly lo-fi (the killer hand cost £400 to make). Despite some fairly bland stories, the film was a turning point for British horror, scoring the first of many anthology hits for Amicus. Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee are great, of course, but I still can't get my head around a cast featuring Donald Sutherland, Roy Castle, Alan Freeman and Kenny Lynch.

Room for a little one? How about *Ghost Track*, (streaming on Prime) which shows how modern camera tech can turn anyone into a filmmaker. This home-made British horror follows a vengeful spirit that haunts (and kills) his former friends. Make no mistake, this is micro-budget filmmaking; but if you can cope with the shot-on-a-phone vibe, it's got heart and ambition, and a moment featuring a falling car that's genuinely impressive on a budget like this. No robots though. Soz.

"The logical and necessary collision between Hellblazer and Jet Set Willy"
Kieron Gillen (The Wicked + The Divine)



HEX LOADER

An almost true
1980s saga of cursed
computer games,
punk art communes,
yuppie sorcerers and
gun-toting wombats.

Buy the graphic novel and download the
free ZX Spectrum game at www.hexloader.com

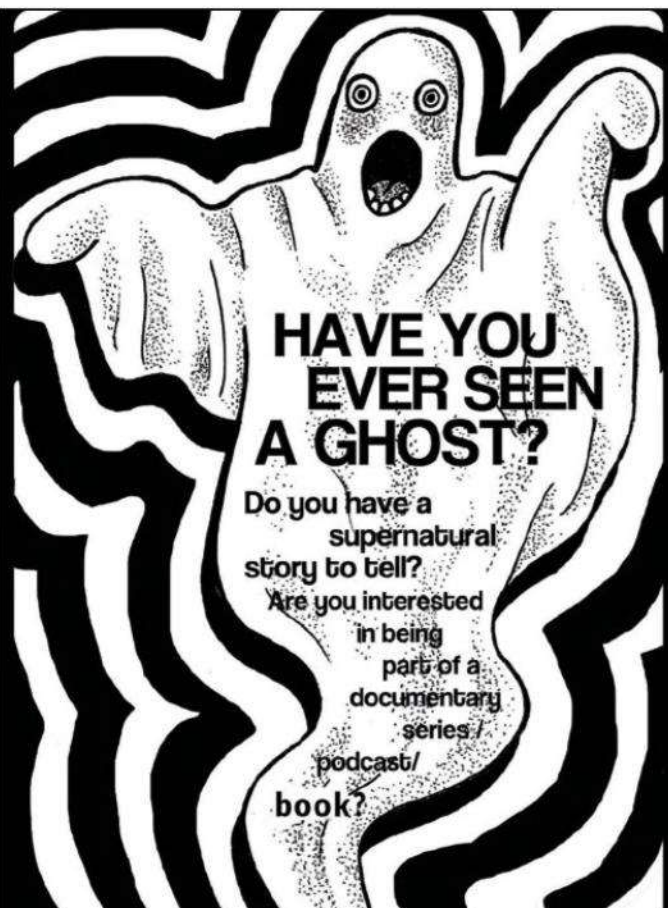
One God but many Religions.

WHY?

THE
RESTORED
SCRIPTURES

**For some answers download
this FREE e-book at:**

www.smashwords.com/books/view/1125048



**HAVE YOU
EVER SEEN
A GHOST?**

Do you have a
supernatural
story to tell?

Are you interested
in being
part of a
documentary
series /
podcast /
book?

To find out more, contact:
INPURSUITOFGHOSTS@GMAIL.COM

LETTERS

CONTACT US BY POST: PO BOX 1200, WHITSTABLE CT1 9RH, OR E-MAIL SIEVEKING@FORTEANTIMES.COM
PLEASE PROVIDE US WITH YOUR POSTAL ADDRESS



Beloved tome

What a glorious start to 2023, with a long-awaited essay on a tome, beloved of so many children of the 1970s [FT427:28-35]. Billy Rough's feature captured precisely the love we all have for *Folklore Myths and Legends of Britain* – arguably the finest publication to come out of Reader's Digest since *Treasures of Britain*.

Surely I wasn't the only child of the 1970s who claimed ownership of the book and used every form of emotional blackmail to ensure the family summer holiday was spent on whichever chapter took my fancy that week?

The art, the stories, the sense of mysteries to be explored, often a mere short drive from home? How many of us discovered a love for folklore, magic and fairy tales, based solely on this book?

Thanks for a trip down memory lane and a renewed vow to seek out those last few mysteries.

Martin Paul

By email

Xmas Truce

I enjoyed the Mythconception on the 'soccer truce' [FT426:19]. Being a Great War Geek (I'm on the committee of the Cleveland branch of the Western Front Association), I have to point out that the Tommies are mistakenly shown wearing steel helmets. I'm afraid they weren't issued until late 1915 and not in quantity until spring 1916. Many people get sentimental about the Christmas Truce, but it didn't mean a lot at the time. There is an amusing story in one of the late Richard Holmes's books about a German soldier shouting "Hello! I am Fritz the bun maker from London. What is the football news?" He was apparently a Chelsea supporter.

George Featherston

By email

Fearsome spike

The article about satanic toys [FT426:28-33] got me thinking about a related moral panic of 1980s Britain. It seemed to me that every year we were told to prepare for a wave of unlicensed



Jacqueline Steel spotted this rather grumpy tree spirit in the Surrey woods. "It got grumpier as I got closer, so I took a pic and ran away," she said.

*We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to **Fortean Times**, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to sieveking@forteanimes.com*

Christmas toys flooding our shores from the Far East, and the dire consequences contained within. I have memories of news features of snow globes containing toxic water, dolls' houses with lead paint and teddy bears with eyes hanging by a thread. Perhaps the most gruesome footage I remember is of an earnest trading standards officer removing the head of a doll to reveal a sharp and sizeable spike. I would love that to appear on YouTube.

An Internet search turns up a Hansard reference to a speech by Mr Conal Gregory in December 1985 warning of such things, so perhaps the news items I re-

member so clearly were all from that year rather than spread over the decade. I certainly remember John Craven gravely telling us about it in a Newsround broadcast when I was 12. Any FT report about spiking incidents immediately sparks the memory of that 1980s headless doll.

James Fisher

Leeds, West Yorkshire

Mummers

I recently watched a repeat on BBC4 of a programme Lucy Worsley had made about Tudor Christmas. In this programme Mumming is mentioned, a possible forerun-

ner to Hallowe'en in which people in disguise frightened people into giving them food, drink and money. At Christmas 2019 FT ran an article on Mumming plays that take place on Boxing Day [FT387:40-43]. I assume there is some kind of connection, although on the surface they seem very different. Possibly just the word 'mumming' was used, or one morphed into the other. Does anyone know how or why – or even if – this happened?

Clive Watson

By email

Ghosts of the Hoo Peninsula

Thank you for Neil Arnold's article about Charles Dickens and Rochester [FT426:40-44]. It brought back a lot of memories from when I lived in the area over 50 years ago – too young to be a ghost hunter, but already fascinated by the subject. In particular, it made me think of a couple of spooks that, at the time, were said to haunt my home village of Hoo St Werburgh, across the Medway on the Hoo Peninsula in Kent.

The first was the captain of one of the German U-Boats that were scuttled in the marshes after World War I. Apparently, he could be seen standing either on, or close to, what were still the very visible remains of one submarine, looking at the surrounding countryside through binoculars. The story was that if he looked directly at you, you would soon die. The other was a witch, usually described as young and beautiful, who was said to haunt the boundaries of St Werburgh churchyard, sitting on a low stone wall. Apparently, she would ask people who saw her if they could spare her first, a coin; then, a kiss; and finally, a memory. Then she would vanish.

Interestingly, decades after I heard the latter story (and moved far away from the area), I heard about the remains of a decapitated teenage girl, "believed to be" around 700 years old, being discovered buried in what would have been unconsecrated ground beyond the churchyard. It was

LETTERS

suggested that she may have been accused of witchcraft; the only reference I can now find is at www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/occult/hoo-st-werburgh-witch-buried/. Either way, I'm guessing it was her.

Dave Thompson
Newark, Delaware

Classified ops

Re Geoff Clifton's observations [FT423:61-62]: what he hasn't suggested is that these UAPs and 'tic tacs' are most likely experimental US military devices and nothing to do with China or Russia. A US pilot in a 'need to know' military culture will have absolutely no

idea what new equipment is being worked on and this would be advantageous to testing. If a pilot happens to take one out, top brass can quickly move in and cover up. Just look at the wonders such as drones available to the public. I can't even imagine what the US military has up its sleeve....

Paul S Inglis
By email

Nazi weapons

In his – otherwise entertaining – review of *The Saucer and the Swastika* by SD Tucker [FT426:52], Jerry Glover says: "The history of the Nazi spacecraft myth splits into two main periods. In the first,

Nazi engineers and scientists designed prototype 'flying saucers' from 'foo fighters' to *Die Glocke*, the beloved 'bell' craft of commercial TV 'history' shows (spoiler: they didn't)."

Now, while I personally feel that the concept of *Die Glocke* is perhaps stretching the plausibility band a bit too far, it is a fact that, both before and during WWII, a variety of patents were filed for very exotic-looking, saucer-shaped craft. Also, the Owl Mountains super-complex, and many others, which were (probably) part of a last-ditch overarching project – 'Project Riese' (Giant), where 5,000 out of 13,000 slave labourers died during construction – and Secret Weapons supremo SS-Obergruppenführer Hans Kammler had 300 scientists shot dead at the Wenceslas Mine in Poland, (no Project Paperclip get-out for them!) and most of the extensive tunnel complex back-filled (to this day), were so very obviously incredibly important to the last attempt at beating the Allies back, and were guarded by tens of thousands of troops late into March 1945, when they would have been of far more value deployed elsewhere, that I feel there's no smoke without at least some fire.

To completely dismiss a subject in such a cursory fashion is not fortéan. Naughty Mr Glover!

Mark Pearson
By email

Sergeant Bilko

I was amused by Phil Brand's letter about the mistaken identification of Sergeant Bilko as the new military ruler of Pakistan [FT423:62]. During the 1980s and early 1990s, I worked for a company called Outer Limits. We supplied T-shirts and other rock memorabilia to HMV, Virgin, Our Price and other record shops. We also stocked TV- and film-related merchandise. One of these lines was in Sergeant Bilko T-shirts. There was a story going round at the time that travellers to the East wearing Bilko T-shirts were often thought to be wearing representations of the Dalai Lama, and attracted much attention.

Where will Bilko turn up next?

Mark Wood
Hillingdon, west London

Twerton

With all due respect to Antony Milne [FT424:63], it's pretty safe to say that the idea of spooklights being living entities can be traced back much further than the 19th century. While it's gratifying that Carl Kraft and Wilhelm Reich get honourable mention, in Somerset such a belief can be traced back at least as far as the Romans.

Most of the denizens of modern-day Twerton don't write books on the subject, and in any case the ancient history of Twerton [a suburb of Bath] is all but obliterated under the rampagous hideosity of the soulless newage. Twerton is, however, under the veil, just as Neolithic as much of our neighbouring county, Wiltshire.

The Neolithic stone circle here goes under various names, but I rather like the epithet "Moonhenge". The "Slaughter Stone" was at the centre of the ring and was until the 1970s in situ in the back garden of the Belvoir Castle pub. The Celtic temple of the goddess Arianrhod dates from approximately 950 BC and was largely made of wood, essentially a big round hut that eventually rotted away. It was replaced by a temple of Bastet in about 35 BC, at the behest of Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII; this was repurposed in about AD 60 as the temple of the Roman Goddess Diana.

In about 1120, the Knights Templar built their preceptory here, then in 1400 Henry IV founded the quasi-Templar Order of the Bath here. The Elizabethan Rosicrucians took over the site in about 1580 and built the Swan theatre here in 1588. Here Shakespeare trod the boards and wrote about a dozen of his sonnets, possible "Venus and Adonis", much of "King Lear", "Antony and Cleopatra", "Macbeth", and "Coriolanus", when the London playhouses were bedevilled by plague. In 1888, Sit Isaac Pitman bought the site and established the Fifth Phonetic Institute here, which became the Pitman Press and then in 1984 the Bath Press.



Haunted bothy

Peter McCue's atmospheric article about haunted bothies [FT426:46-47] reminded me of a story I was told while working on a TV programme at the Alvie and Dalraddy Estate near Aviemore in 2017. In the mountains above the estate, by a stream called Allt Na Cornlaraiche, lies a beautiful, upscale but rather ramshackle bothy. A group of extremely sincere ex-army guys, who run an outdoor pursuits centre nearby, told me three of them had recently stayed the night inside it. Two of them slept in the bothy's bedroom, one on a bench in the spartan main living room area. In the dead of night, the two men in the bedroom felt the wooden bed shake violently. They got up in a state of shock to find their

colleague in the main room looking even more unsettled. At the moment the bed had started shaking he had awoken to see a group of men, in what looked like period Edwardian dress, peering down at him. These spectral figures vanished moments later.

We used the bothy as the location for some filming and sadly nothing supernatural happened while we were there. But perhaps in an example of the hitchhiker effect, a ghost seemed to follow us to a nearby hotel. Two researchers on the programme demanded to be moved after they said a ghostly hand appeared through the door of their room. I'd love to know if anyone else has heard any stories about this bothy.

Mark Carter
By email



Countdown

Did anyone else notice FT's 'appearance' on the TV programme Countdown on 9 November 2022? The letters pulled could make both FORTEAN and FORTEANA. None of the contestants or experts in Dictionary Corner got it. Poor show!

- On a completely unrelated matter the Spiderman gimp featured in The Bigfeet of Britain article [FT425:30-36] has jogged a memory I realise now was actually extremely odd. In July 2011 I was in Bath city centre with my wife, just ambling along as sightseers. On the other side of the road we saw a figure dressed completely head-to-toe in a royal blue, elasticated gimp suit. The head and face were also

completely covered. The figure was in something of a hurry as if late for an appointment or running away, not wishing to be caught.

I remember chuckling at the sight of this eccentric get-up and admiring the person's bravado in not giving a damn what others might think. My first thought was that he was part of a pub crawl or stag do. However, having read many similar sightings of peculiar figures in FT, I realise it was unusual. Primarily, the fact it was a regular weekday around three or four in the afternoon, plus the person was alone and seemed to be in such a hurry. Perhaps we did see something out of place or time. It would be fun to think so!

Duncan Kaiser
Pfeffingen, Switzerland

Currently the site is derelict and covered in rubble. Many of us would like to use the rich history of the site to create the Bath Shakespeare Centre here.

Sean —
East Twerton, Somerset

Here be monsters

I am a part-time Archive Assistant for the History of Advertising Trust Ltd. Something caught my eye in *Harmsworth's Children's Encyclopedia* from circa 1910/1911. In this issue's 'The Little Book of Nature' (a regular feature), the topic was "unknown animals".

The first part of the article dealt with a mysterious creature, a possible survivor from the Age of the Dinosaurs, living in an African swamp: "The story was first heard from natives in Africa a good many years ago, by a trustworthy traveller named Menges. It came up again a few years ago when Mr. Carl Hagenbeck, the greatest

importer of wild animals in the world, received two different reports to the same effect. One of his own hunters, who had been in Rhodesia in search of animals, heard of it; and an English traveller, who had entered and left Rhodesia by a different route from that taken by Mr. Hagenbeck's representative, also heard of it. The natives describe it as a



huge monster, 'half elephant, and half dragon', dwelling in the great swamps in the interior, which are hundreds of square miles in extent. There are drawings of such an animal in certain caves in Rhodesia; which suggest that the natives have wonderful imaginations, or have actually seen such a creature."

It seems that Hagenbeck did try to find the creature: "Mr. Hagenbeck firmly believes that such an animal as this monster does exist to-day in the great and silent swamps of Rhodesia, and he sent an expedition to hunt for it. The hunt failed, for the men were laid low with terrible fevers, and attacked by bloodthirsty savages. Although he failed on this occasion, Mr. Hagenbeck, in a book that he has written called 'Beasts and Men', says that he hopes yet to prove that this animal does exist. He thinks that it must be like the extinct brontosaurus."

There is an accompanying illustration of the creature along with a map, which puts the creature's location as somewhere north of the Lunga and Kafue rivers, and not far from the Congolese border – which begs the question, did *Mokele-M'Bembe* migrate northwards, or are we looking at a related creature?

Another creature mentioned in the same article is the Giant Ground Sloth (*Megatherium* or *Myiodon*). The article speculates why these impressive creatures became extinct – it puts the blame on Guanacos [close relatives of the llama], theorising that "by constantly biting off the young shoots of trees, [they] killed all the forests in which the sloths lived." However, it then points out: "If we grant that, however, it does not account for the disappearance of the horse. There were at one time myriads of horse-like animals in South America, but when the first white man landed there, there was not a horse in the entire continent. These are mysteries for which we cannot account."

"Anyhow, natu-

ralists sent out an expedition, fully believing that somewhere in the remote part of South America, the giant sloth still exists. The expedition was not successful; but we know that the great monsters lived in caves with men, and that men and women and children made pets of them; for after all these ages we find the very grass which the men cut for sloths turned into withered hay, in the caverns where they and their vast pets lived."

"Fancy having for a pet animal a creature 14 feet [4.3m] feet high, and strong enough to pull down an oak tree! The giant sloth has not been found alive; probably it never will; possibly the last one died ages and ages ago. Still, the naturalist, when he gives himself over to dreams, likes to think the thing possible."

Again, there is an illustration, with the caption: "A few years ago a band of British hunters went in search for this monster in Patagonia, but were unable to find it."

The article continues with: "Scientists wisely refuse to believe anything until they see it before them," and that "men still go wearily seeking the moa, the giant bird of New Zealand, fully believing that the natives are right when they say that here and there, in the heart of the New Zealand mountains, these feathered giants still live."

For the final part, an Asian ungulate (and real-life animal), the Takin, is mentioned, "but because its home is mysterious Tibet, a land into which it has been too dangerous for Europeans to go, it has been regarded as having no existence."

Making such finds is why I love my job!

Leslie Hurn
Norwich, Norfolk



"I think I'm being followed"

CLIVE GODDARD

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

HAUNTED LEBANESE HOTEL

Perched on a hill in a village in Mount Lebanon, Al Aamirya Hotel stands witness to prosperous times this country once knew. Built in the Fifties by Qaysar Amer, a renowned fireworks and toys merchant, the building comprised a hotel, administrative quarters, cinema and church. It quickly became one of the most famous tourist attractions until the start of the civil war in 1975, when it was abandoned, like many other buildings.

Used by militias, refugees and others, it became a derelict ruin where many experienced paranormal events that shook them to the core. I explored the building in 2011, before helping a friend out with their graduation senior movie project, which was using the building as a setting. There was something scary about every room, hallway, staircase, old mosaics, and cinema... Underground vaults led to a grotto only accessible by an old rusty ladder that no one ever took downstairs. The cross on the church had been removed; Qaysar Amer asked to be buried under the church he built.

One small room with its walls knocked down was festooned in candles from top to bottom. The police said it had been used as a gathering place for Satanists in the 1990s.

On the night of the shoot, I was enjoying a smoke in the gentle breeze of summer at the former swimming pool, when I glanced up at the eight floors of the hotel and saw a woman in her late thirties, dressed in a nightgown, looking out of a window. When our eyes met, she let out a silent scream that still gives me shivers down my spine when I think of it. At the time, I thought this was nothing but a silly prank by the film crew and did not even ask any of my colleagues if this was one of them mucking about.

Now that I am more open to the paranormal, I researched the hotel's history. Only one



**"THE FATHER
HANGED THE WIFE
AND CHILD BEFORE
KILLING HIMSELF"**



family was still living in the hotel after the civil war, until the father hanged his wife and child before killing himself. Rumour has it that a huge fire then ripped through the hotel, burning furniture and documents, and the many brothers and sisters who inherited the building decided to abandon it. Looking online, I found a video of the hotel shot by some teenagers, and in it I saw the woman again. This time she was sitting on a staircase with her back turned to the camera. She was wearing the same nightgown I saw her in back in 2011.

Was this the woman who was killed by her husband? Or maybe one of the many people killed in the hotel during the civil war...

Ralf Frem
Beirut, Lebanon

Editor's note: Ralf Frem is an art director for cinema and television, and has worked on several TV shows and commercials in Lebanon and the Arab world.

VANISHING DOGS

This morning [22 Nov 2022], I went for a walk in Maidstone Cemetery in the glorious autumn sunshine, and it prompted a memory.

A couple of summers ago I was taking a similar walk, enjoying the peace of my nearest green space, and dawdling among the stones within sight of the Pheasant Lane gate (there are three entrances). From the corner of my eye I noticed movement and, turning, saw a middle-aged couple wandering up the path towards the gate. They were flanked by a pair of large dogs (I forget what breeds – two different ones), that sauntered about, sniffing as dogs do. I thought nothing of it; the place is a common dog-walking area, and I observed the group with little interest. The dogs slipped behind a large shrub, out of sight, and the couple, on reaching the open gate, walked through without pause. They

didn't stop and look back, or call to their pets, or give any sign of being aware of their presence. They just left. After a while, I went to the path in search of the dogs. There were none, and a thorough search revealed no sign of any, or of anyone else who might have been their owner. The couple never once left my sight until they'd passed through the gate, and the dogs had disappeared.

Arthur Burton
Maidstone, Kent

LOST IN THE WOODS

I read with interest the report about the lady who had an odd experience in woods in Co. Meath in Ireland [FT425:5]. About 30 years ago, my wife was meeting friends in Tunbridge Wells, near a small village called Rusthall. We were walking back after a night out (not drunken!) and my wife mentioned a short cut through woods, which we then took, although I gently teased her about the fairy people and folk belief in same. Being a bigger sceptic than me, she laughed – but then literally disappeared between two trees. I felt the temperature drop and hadn't a clue where I was.

I called. No answer. I could hear distant voices, the direction of which was uncertain. One voice sounded like my wife, while the other voice was with a giggle. I was worried. I couldn't find a path or track to where she was. I sat down, and a few minutes later what seemed like a parallel universe came alive. My wife was in front of me asking me where I had been. It seems I had been missing for an hour, but in my mind it was only five minutes! It was like suspended animation; time stood still.

I think that similar events happen the world over. Are there portals that unsuspecting sceptics can slip into? I've an open mind – but I had a brandy when we got back to friends.

Dave McHugh
Monkstown Valley, Co. Dublin, Ireland



ADOBE STOCK

"I FELT THE POWER OF THOSE FEET AS THEY THRUST AGAINST THE HOT SAND, AND THEN MY WINGS SPREAD"

STRANGE FLIGHT

I had the following strange but exciting experience when I was in my early twenties (I am now in my early seventies), and to me it felt special and so I have only ever told a few select people whom I knew would not spoil the magic, but could perhaps shed a light on what it could have been.

To set the stage, in early 1973 I was working in a remote zoo surrounded by marshland. It was rather dank and foreboding and very dark at night. There were two other girls lodged with me in an old farmhouse run by two old ladies, and the men were in another cottage about a mile down the lane. It was not really a happy place and I only stayed a few months. Then one day it 'happened to me'. This is my account.

The atmosphere was tense and the other two girls were odd to say the least. Anyway,

one morning I awoke early as usual, but realised it was my day off. I glanced at the time – 7am – and sank backwards onto the bed again. As I sank back, I was somewhere else and had regained an upright position. I was aware of a red hue, and felt hot sand under my feet. Looking down, however, my 'feet' were huge powerful three-toed bird type ones and I started to run. I felt the power of those feet as they thrust against the hot sand and then my wings spread and I could feel the air rushing past my ears and the lift of flight under my wings. Then as I accelerated I took off and then my wings folded back and I went supersonic. The exhilaration was terrific and I felt ecstatic as I soared off. All I could see was the red haze. Then I felt myself decelerating and felt again the rush of wind against my ears and as I returned, it was backward into my body and I felt my wings beating to facilitate re-entry. As I was almost settled I half opened my eyes and peeping to the left saw a white whispiness sink back into my arm. Then all was normal again. My flight seemed to last seconds, but two hours of actual time had passed. Am I a bird? Did my soul nip off for a bit of rest and recreation? The experience was fantastic and special, and

whatever it was I feel privileged to have done it.

June Gwynn (pseudonym)
Alcombe, Somerset

SEEING HER AGAIN

With regard to Albert Ravey's "Dreaming the Future" letter [FT425:62]: years ago I was on a skiing holiday and had an interesting dream about a cast of characters I went on an adventure with on a magic carpet. One was a beautiful woman, who ended the dream with an obscure quotation about always being together in Spirit, or something (it was a long time ago). The following day, when I was riding the bus around the ski resort, I found myself sitting opposite someone who had the exact face of the beautiful woman in my dream – and I remember the jolting sense of unreality, that something mystical was in the air. Years later I wrote and produced a student film that incorporated the same sense of 'cosmic destiny' around the people we meet, dreams and synchronicity. I freely acknowledge that people can rationalise backwards and give themselves false memories when it comes to premonitions, but I do remember this incident as being distinctly eerie.

James Wright
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

135. Black Shuck Festival, Bungay

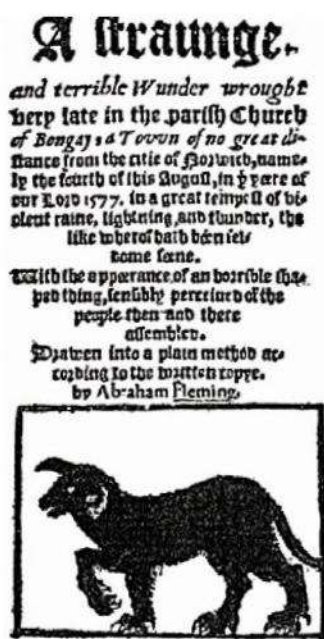
ROBERT HALLIDAY takes part in an anniversary commemoration of Suffolk's most celebrated hellhound, the Black Dog of Bungay.



ABOVE: The procession bearing Black Shuck passes St Mary's Church, Bungay. BELOW: Abraham Fleming's 1577 pamphlet.

Bungay will always occupy a place in British folklore and in the annals of forteana for its associations with the Black Dog of Bungay, which is said to have wrought havoc in St Mary's Church on 4 August 1577 (see FT251:22-23, 424:14-17). The Black Dog of Bungay is now, to all intents and purposes, conflated with Black Shuck, the phantom dog (some might even say the phantom hell hound) of East Anglia (see FT17:12-13, 195:30-35 251:22-23, 278:16, 412:58-59). While place-specific, the Black Dog of Bungay has a much longer history than his more itinerant counterpart, as the legend can be clearly dated to 1577.

It is an established fact that a storm, accompanied by thunder and lightning, hit



the Suffolk coast on 4 August 1577. The storm is detailed in Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* of the history of England. The storm's impact on Bungay is recorded in St Mary's parish records: the burial registers record the burial of John Fuller and Adam Walker that same month. Parish register entries for burials, baptisms and marriages are normally brief, terse and laconic, but these say, "slain in the tempest in the belfry at the time of prayer upon the Lord's Day, the 4 of August". In the margin is added, "the tempest of thunder". The churchwardens' accounts, too, record that women were paid for laying out the bodies of the two men killed in the belfry during the storm. Subsequently, in 1579,

the churchwardens' accounts record payments to carpenters for repairing the storm damage. In both entries it is added that the storm was an unforgettable time of "thunder, lightning, rain and darkness as never was seen, the lie never to be forgotten".

The Black Dog of Bungay was subsequently guaranteed his appearance in folklore by Abraham Fleming, a prolific author of the time, then aged between 25 and 29, who, within a few days of the storm, published a pamphlet, *A Strange And Terrible Wunder Wrought Very Late In The Parish Church Of Bongay* (spelling copied as originally printed). Abraham Fleming claimed that the Devil had appeared in St Mary's in the form of a black dog and created havoc, killing two men, and seriously wounding a third. It is hard to know exactly how to believe Fleming: his account of events seems consistent with the church records, and the description of the wounds suffered by the victims again sounds plausible (especially as it sounds more like people hurt by lightning or electricity than savaged by an angry dog), but he fails to name his informants. This pamphlet seems to have been a bestseller at the time, and reprints have continued to circulate in Bungay ever since. Thus, in 1953, when the town was granted a coat of arms, the town councillors asked that the crest be a black dog and forked lightning. Far from being a cause of shame or embarrassment to the town, the Black Dog has long since been a source of civic pride.¹

It was not until the mid-19th century that there was a serious effort to collate and compare legends of the appearance of black dogs in Norfolk and Suffolk. This being was first called 'Shuck' in the first volume of *Notes And Queries* in 1850.² The name has stuck, and, while this was well over two centuries after the events hit Bungay, the events of 1577 are now often described as Black Shuck's first dramatic appearance.



ABOVE LEFT: Black Shuck and his 'handlers' leave the Castle Ruins; the author, wearing a hat, is visible at the front of the procession. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A flyer showing the day's packed programme of events. **BELOW:** Suffolk children's author and storyteller James Mayhew gives a graphic account of the events of 4 August 1577.

St Mary's Church, the largest church in the town, is a substantial building: it was originally both a civic church and the church of a convent of Benedictine nuns. The nun's section of the church fell into ruin after the Dissolution, and the conventual buildings have long since vanished, but the western half of the church survives. By the middle of the 20th century it was proving somewhat surplus to requirements (the nearby Church of Holy Trinity was able to accommodate Bungay's entire Church of England congregation, while the town also possesses impressive Nonconformist and Roman Catholic places of worship). Thus, St Mary's was vested in the Churches Conservation Trust, who maintain it in excellent condition both as a heritage attraction and a public amenity.

After the Norman Conquest, the Bigods, a Norman baronial family, acquired large estates in Suffolk and Norfolk, and became Earls of Norfolk. They had a castle built in Bungay, but the male family line ended at the end of the 13th century and Bungay Castle was little used after that. However, the castle was built so strongly that it proved impossible to fully demolish, and there are still substantial remains near the town centre.

In 2022, as fear of Covid receded, there was a decision to commemorate the anniversary of the stirring events of 1577 in Bungay. While 4 August fell on a Thursday in 2022, it was thought that this should be the appropriate day, rather than

There was a decision to commemorate the anniversary



the nearest Saturday or Sunday. The event started at 4.30 in the afternoon, on the open field in front of the ruins of Bungay Castle, a most appropriate location, since the tower of St Mary's church is clearly visible from here. A model of Black Shuck had been made by local schoolchildren, some of whom were in attendance on the occasion dressed as fire spirits. A large number of people in Tudor costume attended, including several itinerant musicians who had brought replica musical instruments from the Tudor age.

A parade started just after 5pm, with Black Shuck being carried from the Castle Ruins into the field. The parade lined up and processed down a side alley around the north side of the Castle Ruins into Earsham Street, one of the town's main thoroughfares. It then continued into St Mary's Street, which might be regarded as Bungay's central high street, where Black Shuck was carried to the front of St Mary's Church, before the procession crossed the road, to return around the side street called Castle Orchard back to the front of the Castle Ruins. Here Suffolk children's author and storyteller James Mayhew gave a graphic account of the appearance of the Black Dog in St Mary's Church in the storm of 1577. As he did so,



LEFT: Shuck is placed on the bonfire.
BELOW: Postcards on which people could write their own 'black dogs' before consigning them to the (imaginary) flames.

he produced a large pen and ink painting of the animal's appearance (somewhat in the style of the now discredited Rolf Harris; "Can you see what it is yet?") Charles Christian, a local folklorist, then told some of the stories of the nefarious Bigod family. History has given the Bigod family a reputation for being overambitious and too eager to extend their power, causing numerous quarrels and arguments with many kings of England. Perhaps Charles Christian forsook historical accuracy in his efforts to tell some gripping yarns of the Bigods' ruthless search for power.

It had been announced that the Black Dog was going to be burnt in a bonfire, and a large pile of logs had been set up near the Castle gatehouse. During the afternoon, postcards showing an ominous black dog were circulated. People were asked to write the names of their own "Black Dogs" – things that caused them sorrow or unhappiness – and it was announced that these would be chunked onto the fire and burned along with Black Shuck. But perhaps it was thought that it would be wrong to destroy the model of Black Shuck after such an effort had been

A local in Elizabethan costume stood in the pulpit

made to create him; as he was placed on the woodpile, electric lights were put under the wood and switched on to simulate (rather unconvincingly) the appearance of flames. Let's hope that nobody was too embarrassed by their descriptions of their own personal "black dogs" if these

survived the non-existent blaze.

It was planned to hold further events in commemoration of the Black Dog in St Mary's Church that evening from 8pm. Charles Christian made a second appearance to tell some folktales about the wicked and sinful antics of the local nuns who lived in the convent during the Middle Ages. A classical pianist, William Fergusson, then treated us to several solo pieces by local composers. Unconventional modern folksingers The Feathered Thorns, a duet of Polly Wright and James Wick, then performed several vocal pieces.

After a refreshment break came the finale. A local actor in Elizabethan costume stood in the pulpit to read Abraham Fleming's pamphlet. I had read the pamphlet several times myself, so knew exactly what to expect, but I was quite amazed at his delivery. As the lights were lowered, he held forth in a dramatic, sonorous baritone voice and invoked the wrath of an angry God on the sinful town of Bungay in the storm of thunder and lightning. Suddenly, what seemed to have been a rather pedestrian example of 16th century journalistic prose became a truly

gripping and compelling story. I had read that great clergymen of the Tudor age could move audiences to great emotion with their sermons. Personally, I had wondered how this could be, but when I heard this familiar Elizabethan passage delivered with force, timing and phrasing I was quite surprised at just how powerful it could be. At this point the entire audience had a quite unexpected surprise. The lights dimmed completely, and a man dressed in a large dog's costume leapt into the church and ran through the pews, even jumping into the seats. Several people had been planted in the audience as members of the Elizabethan congregation, and they screamed in terror and even ran into the open spaces between the pews to curl up and roll on the floor in agony. I had never remotely expected that anything like this would take place, and it made for a genuinely dramatic finale to a quite remarkable celebration of one of the great episodes from the folklore of East Anglia.

I am informed that this event is not a one-off. There are now plans to erect a statue of Black Shuck in Bungay. It is hoped that this will be in place later in 2023, when, on 4 August, there are plans for another, even bigger and more ambitious Black Shuck Festival. I would certainly recommend that readers keep a watch out for planned events this year.

NOTES

1 The legend of the Black Dog of Bungay is described in Christopher Reeve, *A Strange And Terrible Wonder: the story of the Black Dog of Bungay*, Morrow and Company, Bungay, 1988. This includes a reprint of the full text of Abraham Fleming's 1577 pamphlet. See also Christopher Reeve and David Waldron, *Shock! The Black Dog Of Bungay: a case study of local folklore*, Hidden Publishing, Harpenden, 2010..

2 ES Taylor, "Shuck the dog fiend", *Notes And Queries*, first series, 1 (1850) p468.

♦ **ROBERT HALLIDAY** is a part-time author and historical lecturer from Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk. He has written several books, including *Cambridge Ghosts* (co-authored with Alan Murdie).



PECULIAR POSTCARDS



JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast remembers a popular, pipe-smoking Argyll hermit and her picturesque shack made from an upturned boat

33. SUSIE IN HER CASTLE



ABOVE: 'Susie's Castle', a postcard stamped and posted at Garelochhead, Argyll, in 1906.

Susan McGlone was born in Glasgow in 1847, the daughter of poor working people; she had a younger brother and sister. After rudimentary schooling, Susie, as she was called, became a mill worker, but she did not like it much. Some time in the 1870s, she married the fisherman Jamie Read, and they settled down in Portincaple, Argyll.

They found an upturned fishing boat, which they converted into a house, with an inglenook fireplace attached, and a small garden surrounding it. Jamie had a proper fishing boat as well,

and although not the most industrious of men, he caught enough fish to keep poverty from the door. Susie sometimes went out with him in the boat, and once they caught and landed a shark.

Jamie and Susie did not bother looking for more promising living accommodation, but remained happily in their upturned boat. They both liked to smoke their pipes, and to 'have a wee dram'; a collection of cats shared the boat with them. They also had a large hen-house, and Susie used to sell the tourists who came to see the 'castle', as the

locals referred to the upturned boat, some fresh eggs. Already in Edwardian times, Jamie and Susie had achieved some degree of local fame, and the 'castle' was depicted in at least two early picture postcards, with Susie standing by the door smoking her pipe.

After Jamie had died from dropsy in 1918, Susie remained in what had become her hermitage. She was well liked locally, in spite of her obvious eccentricity. She lived off the donations from the tourists, and the sale of eggs from her hen-house, preferring to spend her days knitting, reading,

smoking and looking after her many cats.

In 1927, the *Sunday Post* published Susie's photograph, pointing out that "'Old Susie', who has lived for nearly 50 years in her upturned boat at Portincaple, is well known to tourists." Although her habits of drinking and smoking hard were not conducive to a long and healthy life, Susie lived on until January 1929, dying at the age of 81.

There were obituaries in all the local newspapers, to announce that the Hermit of Portincaple had passed on to a Better World.

READER INFO

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

ANNUAL SUB of 12 issues (inc p&p) UK £50.58; Europe £62; USA £70; Rest of World £70.

Please see house ads in the latest issue for details of special offers.

UK, EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA & REST OF WORLD

Major credit cards accepted. Cheques or money orders should be in sterling, preferably drawn on a London bank and made payable to Diamond Publishing Limited. Mail to: **Fortean Times**, Diamond Publishing Limited, 2nd Floor, Saunders House, 52-53 The Mall, Ealing, W5 3AT. NB: This address should be used for orders and subscriptions only.

Telephone payments and queries: +44 (0) 208 752 8195.

E-mail payments and queries: hello@metropolis.co.uk

HOW TO SUBMIT

Fortean Times reserves all rights to reuse material submitted by FT readers and contributors in any medium or format.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Contact the art director by email (etienne@forteantimes.com) before sending samples of work. We cannot guarantee to respond to unsolicited work, though every effort will be made to do so.

ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

Please send all submissions or ideas for articles to David Sutton, Editor, *Fortean Times* by email: dsutton@forteantimes.com. As we receive a large volume of submissions, a decision may not be immediate.

LETTERS

Letters of comment or about experiences are welcome. Send to PO Box 1200, Whitstable, CT1 9RH, UK or email sieveking@forteantimes.com. We reserve the right to edit submissions.

BOOKS, PERIODICALS AND REVIEW MATERIAL

Contact the reviews editor at: dvbarrett@forteantimes.com

CAVEAT

FT aims to present the widest range of interpretations to stimulate discussion and welcomes helpful criticism. The opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the editors. *FT* can take no responsibility for submissions, but will take all reasonable care of material in its possession. Requests for return of material should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope or an International Reply Coupon.

We occasionally use material that has been placed in the public domain. It is not always possible to identify the copyright holder. If you claim credit for something we've published, we'll be pleased to make acknowledgement.

CLIPSTERS WANTED

Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: **1 MAR 2023**. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

Mail to: **Fortean Times, PO BOX 1200, WHITSTABLE, CT1 9RH**

E-mail: news@forteantimes.com

WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is

in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS

AUSTRALIA Graham Cordon (SA), Tony Healy (ACT), John Palazzi (NSW), Len Watson (Qld). **CANADA** Brian Chapman (BC), Graham Conway (BC).

CYBERSPACE John F Callahan, Hugh Henry, Steve Scanlon, Janet Wilson.

ENGLAND Gail-Nina Anderson, Louise Bath, James Beckett, Claire Blamey, Peter Christie, Mat Coward, Kate Eccles, Paul Farthing, George Featherston, Paul Gallagher, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Anne Hardwick, Richard Lowke, Diana Lyons, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Tom Ruffles, Meryl Santis, Paul Screeton, Gary Stocker, Roman Suchyj, Frank Thomas, Paul Thomas, Owen Whiteoak, Bobby Zodiac. **FRANCE** Michel Meurger. **GERMANY** Ulrich Magin. **IRELAND** Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran. **ISRAEL** Zvi Ron. **NEW ZEALAND** Peter Hassall.

SCOTLAND Roger Musson. **SWEDEN** Sven Rosén. **THAILAND** Terry W Colvin.

USA Loren Coleman (ME), Jim Conlan (CT), Myron Hoyt (ME), Greg May (FL), Jim Riecken (NY), Joseph Trainor (MA), Jeffrey Vallance (CA).

FORT SORTERS

Regular Fort Sorts are currently on hiatus – but please continue to send in your clippings to *Fortean Times*, PO Box 1200, Whitstable, CT1 9RH.

CLIPPING CREDITS FOR FT429

Daina Almario-Kopp, Jack Anderson, Gerard Apps, David Barrett, Carole Basey, Lionel Beer, James Beckett, Pat Corcoran, Andy Conlon, Andy Duncan, George Featherston, Eric Fitch, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Hugo Henry, Nigel Herwin, Sharon Hill, Ernest Jackson, Tony James, Rosalind Johnson, Bill & Louise Kelly, Dave Malin, Mick Maloret, Purple Wym, Daniel Scanlon, Paul Screeton, Bob Skinner, Gary Stocker, Clive Watson, Len Watson, Janet Wilson, Owen Whiteoak, James Wright.

PHENOMENOMIX

CARN KENIDJACK

HUNT EMERSON

with a hat-tip to MARY WORRALL

CORNWALL IS STUDDED WITH ANCIENT MYSTERIES! STONE CIRCLES...

TREGEASEAL STONE CIRCLE

...RING-FORTS...

CHUN CASTLE

...QUOITS...

LANYON QUOIT

...ROCKS WITH HOLES IN THEM...

MEN-AN-TOL

TODAY I'M INVESTIGATING CORNISH CREAM TEAS!

NO I'M NOT... I'M INVESTIGATING A STRANGE NATURAL ROCK FORMATION CALLED CARN KENIDJACK...

ALSO KNOWN AS THE HOOTING CARN!

HOOT!

STORIES TELL OF LOCAL FOLK LOSING THEIR WAY AT NIGHT ON THE MOOR...

WHERE AM WE, WALTER? BLESSED IF I KNOW, SAM!

...SEEING STRANGE LIGHTS AND HEARING A TERRIBLE WAILING AND HOWLING NOISE!

...AND STUMBLING ON A SCENE FROM THE OTHER WORLD!

TWO DEVILS BARE-KNUCKLE BOXING UNDER THE ROCKS OF CARN KENIDJACK, SURROUNDED BY A YELLING MOB OF DEMONS DRIVING THEM ON!

THE LOCAL LADS WERE TRANSFIXED AND TERRIFIED! THEY STAYED VERY QUIET UNTIL...

A-choo!

BLESS YOU...

THE HOLY WORD BROKE THE SPELL!

CARN KENIDJACK... THE HOOTING CARN! IS IT A NATURAL PHENOMENON? WIND BLOWING THROUGH THE INTRICATE GAPS IN THE GRANITE?..

HOOT!

...OR IS IT, AS I SUSPECT, A SPECTRAL JAZZ SAXOPHONE PLAYER FROM HELL, SUMMONED THERE BY---WHO KNOWS WHAT RITUAL PRACTICES?!

HOOT! HOOT!

MORE NEXT ISSUE, WHEN WHO SHOULD TURN UP BUT OUR OLD PAL ALEISTER CROWLEY!

COMING NEXT MONTH



DOWN ON THE WITCH FARM

THE HAUNTING
OF HEOL FANOG



SPOON BENDERS & STIGMATICS

ARTHUR C CLARKE'S
WORLD OF STRANGE POWERS



BUDDHISM & SCIENCE,
MYSTERY SOUNDS,
THE CHILDREMASS
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 430
ON SALE 23 MAR 2023

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A 25-year-old man in Houston, Texas, died while dancing on top of a moving 18-wheeler truck. Footage recorded by another driver shows the man standing on the roof of the truck gyrating his hips and waving his arms as it travels down the Eastex Freeway in Houston. He dodges one overpass, then gets up to continue dancing but fails to spot the Tuan Street Bridge, which he struck at speed, sending him crashing to the tarmac. "I saw the bloody chunks on the ground. I saw the contorted body and broken neck and arm," said witness Crystal Davis. "It was a horrible way to begin a day." *metro.co.uk*, 16 Nov 2022.

When Hull University student Harry Bolton, 19, did not answer his door to housemates or respond to texts, they called site security to break into his room, where they found him dead inside with a large, infected wound on his back. The previous day Bolton had told friends that a spider had bitten him on the back and that he was feeling unwell, so they advised him to seek medical attention. He went to Hull Royal Infirmary, where it was noted that he had a high temperature and elevated heart rate. A blood test found nothing to cause concern, so he discharged himself, agreeing to return the next day for a check-up, but died in the night. At the inquest into Bolton's death, coroner Paul Marks recorded that his death was caused by sepsis, due to an acute chest infection, resulting from an infected wound on his back. Deaths from spider bites are almost unknown in the UK, with the only other known death from spider bite in the last 30 years occurring in 2014, when Pat Gough-Irwin, 60, died after being bitten by a false widow spider at her home in Hampshire (for more on false widows, see **FT337:22**, 347:80). *telegraph.co.uk*, 2 Dec 2022.

Festive sport in India has been more than usually lethal in recent weeks. During a festival in Andhra Pradesh, two men have been stabbed to death by chickens. Cockfights are a traditional pastime there, particularly during the Sankranti festival, and while the most extreme version of the sport, involving attaching long blades to the cock's feet, has been banned in India since 2018, many still flout the law, sometimes with lethal consequences. In Kakinada,

Gande Suryapraksha Rao was attaching blades to his prize cockerel ahead of a bout when something startled the bird and it flew up, causing the blade to cut Rao's leg, severing the femoral artery so that he bled to death despite being rushed to hospital. At another event in East Godavari, a spectator at a cockfight was struck on the hand with a blade, resulting in severe bleeding. He, too, died before reaching hospital.

Elsewhere, in Gujarat, six people died from kite strings cutting their throats during the annual Uttarayan festival. This takes place in mid-January and marks the beginning of the end of winter. It involves competitive kite flying, with participants using strings crusted with fragments of glass to sever other people's kite strings. Three children died; two girls, both aged two, one who was riding with her father on a bike when a string caught her throat, and a seven-year-old boy, as well as three men in Vadodara, Kutch and Gandhinagar. In addition to the deaths, 30 people sustained serious cuts and 46 were injured falling from buildings while flying kites during the two-day festival. *dailymail.co.uk*, *standard.co.uk*, 18 Jan 2023.

In Japan, the end of Covid restrictions has meant the return of bonenkai ("forget the year") parties – alcohol-fuelled binges at which office workers get together to mark the end of the year. Dreaded by many due to the pressure to both get drunk and remain polite in the presence of their bosses, the revived parties have also caused concern to authorities due to the rise in "road sleeping" deaths. These occur when revellers keel over in the middle of the road, go to sleep, and are subsequently struck by vehicles. This seems to be a particular problem in Tokyo, where road sleeping deaths rose from seven in 2021 to 13 in 2022, and Japanese authorities feared that the end of year festivities would further increase the toll. As a result, they commissioned a public information film from the popular comedy duo Cowcow to be shown on monitors in taxis to warn people of the risks of road sleeping and issued advice to organisations representing the taxi and trucking industries asking their drivers to slow down and be alert for road sleepers. *theguardian.com*, 14 Dec 2022.



OFFICIALLY THE MOST ETHICAL VITAMIN COMPANY



Always made with
100% active ingredients.
No binders. No fillers.
No nasties.



viridian

Available in local health food stores: findahealthstore.com



Guaranteed
Non-GMO



No Animal
Testing



Palm Oil
Free



Organic
Certification



Eco
Packaging

\$6.66
PER ISSUE



A
MONSTER
APP

THE WORLD'S #1 HORROR MAGAZINE
IS NOW AVAILABLE PRIOR TO NEWSSTANDS ON **iPHONE** AND **ANDROID**.

VISIT RUE-MORGUE.COM ON THE  **APP STORE**

FOLLOW US ON **INSTAGRAM**, **TWITTER** AND **FACEBOOK**   